

Troubled Topography

A phenomenological 'cyclo-geography' research into the borderlands of the Irish Northern-Irish border.



Jesse van Hulst

Radboud University Nijmegen

Supervisor: O. Kramsch

Spring 2017

Contents

1. Introduction.....	4
2. Theoretical framework	6
2.1 Mobilities paradigm	6
2.2 Experiencing the world	6
2.3 Research on the move	7
2.4 Walking in geography	7
2.5 Cycling in geography	7
2.6 Cyclo-geography.....	8
3. Research methodology	9
3.1 Research questions	9
3.2 Research strategy and research material.....	10
3.3 Research planning	10
3.4 Cycling route	10
3.5 Interview technique.....	12
4. Border studies	16
5 Irish- Northern Irish border.....	19
5.1 The Irish border.....	19
5.2 Geophysical processes	19
5.3 Creation of the border	21
5.4 Conflict on the island	22
5.5 The borderlands	22
5.6 View from below	22
5.7 Social and academic relevancy	23
6. Data collection	24
6.1 Interviews.....	24
6.2 Site visit	24
7. The stories from the borderlanders.	26
7.1 Life at the borderlands: Pre-troubles.	26
7.2 Life at the borderlands: the Troubles.....	29
7.3 Border towns.....	34
7.4 Life at the borderlands: Post-troubles	35

7.5 European Union	37
7.6 Sense of place.....	39
7.7 Identities	40
7.8 Border identities	42
7.9 Brexit	44
8. Cyclo-geography: the borderlands from the perspective of the Bicycle	46
8.1 The first days and a market place.....	46
8.2 Parks and flags.	52
8.3 Border legend.....	55
8.4 Another Bandit town.	58
8.5 The Aleph	63
8.6 “ ~ “	68
9. Conclusion.	71
10. References.....	79
11. Appendices	82
11.1 Map of the border region	82
11.2 Transcriptions	83
11.3 Atlas.ti analysis	83

1. Introduction

2016 has been a tumultuous year for the European Union. An unprecedented 'Brexit' vote caused fundamental doubts about the success of the European Union. Besides, during the 'refugee crisis', borders in the EU were closed off or extra guarded, contradicting the Schengen agreements. It seems that the nation states across Europe have been falling back on national emotions and have lost sight of the bigger ideal of the European Union. The exit of the United Kingdom is a climax in the European drama about immigration and border control. The Brexit vote was primarily about 'control of own borders'. Borders become relevant again in Europe. This counts in particular for the Irish – Northern Irish border, which will become a European outer border. This will have great consequences for the people living in and around these 'borderlands'. If the border becomes militarized as all European outer borders, or even closed, it will have a fundamental impact on people's daily lives. It is highly relevant to research how people deal with the borderlands at present, because these data will help re-conceptualize the dominant political discourse of a border.

A border is much more than a mere jurisdictional separation, it is a lived space for many. It is an important dimension in the forming of identities. Especially in Ireland, where this border played a significant role in recent conflicts, the Troubles. It is highly valuable to research this borderland and how people have been interacting with the border. If the United Kingdom and Ireland decide on what to do with the border in view of the Brexit, this knowledge becomes vital to understand the impact the border has had and will have on the people living around the border. To further re-conceptualize the dominant idea of the border and to further understand the lived spaces of the borderland better, a phenomenological research into this borderland will be a great asset. Through the experiences that one gets from the border, one will understand the border and give meaning to the border. In order to fully 'experience' the border, a cyclo-geography research is proposed. Cyclo-geography' implies that the researcher will cycle along the border, fully experiencing the border as an extension of the long history of walking in geography. Being on a bicycle, one experiences the border as a whole; all senses are utilized because of the human powered transport. Cyclo-geography using a phenomenological approach enhances the experiences of the borderlands. In combination with interviews of people living along the border it will therefore be a solid base to accomplish the goal of this research; to understand the lived experiences of the Irish border throughout history, the peace processes and the Brexit. It will therefore be a combination of the insiders perspective and an outsiders perspective, the former being created through interviews and the latter through a phenomenological site visit on a bicycle. Based on this concept the following research question is made:

To what extent can we understand through a 'cyclo-geography' methodology how the Irish border has influenced the creation of identities in the border region and how will Brexit alter these identities in the light of the peace processes?

The sub questions deal with themes like the Troubles, the peace processes in Northern Ireland, the European Union, the Brexit and the understanding of a region through a bicycle journey.

This gathered knowledge will be very helpful for the governments of the two countries in their debate on how to proceed with the return of the national border. Besides, using a bicycle to conduct research will be of academic value because it will open up a new debate and field within the social science academic world.



Figure 1: Velo-flaneuring in Ireland (picture by the author).

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Mobilities paradigm

In order to get a grip of the Irish-Northern-Irish borderlands, this research will be done 'on the move' along the entire border. Instead of being on a static place, data will be generated while being mobile. This notion of doing research on the move fits in the 'new mobilities paradigm' by (Sheller & Urry, 2006). They propose in their highly influential article that the world is on the move; in order to understand social concepts, research phenomena and explore identities, one must be on the move too. As the world becomes more mobile, social sciences must become too. Fincham et al (2010) continued this new mobility paradigm in their book "Mobile methodologies". As they state in the introduction "The world appears different on the move – we understand it and relate to it in distinct ways from when we are still" (p. 7). Combining these two strings of thought conclude; the world is on the move and the academic world can research the world too while being mobile.

Sheller and Urry (2006, p. 216) further add that there are 6 new theoretical resources that support the new mobilities paradigm. One of them which is highly important for this paper is the notion of understanding 'the sensual experience of actually being human and living through a material body' (Evans & Jones, 2008, p. 1268). Falling back on ideas of phenomenology Urry and Sheller try '[recentering] of [the] the corporeal body as an affective vehicle through which we sense place and movement, and construct emotional geographies' (Sheller and Urry 2006, 216). Stepping away from positivist geographies, Sheller and Urry embrace the fact that we understand and give meaning to the world through our embodied experiences. We construct a 'topophilia' (Tuan, 1974) or a love for a place through these corporeal experiences. As Edensor (2002), MacNaghten & Urry (1997) and Evans & Jones (2008) have demonstrated: "senses, such as sight, sound, smell and touch play a significant role in determining how people perceive places and experiences" (Evans & Jones P. 1274). Experiencing the world and give meaning to the world therefore happens through movement and our senses.

2.2 Experiencing the world

This way of understanding the world is not entirely new, Fincham et al (2010) introduced Baudelaire's work from the 19th century about 'flaneuring' or being a 'flaneur' as a way of understanding and because of the movement truly experience the city. A flaneur is a person who would 'stroll or wander aimlessly' through a place and Baudelaire wrote poetry about his 'flaneurings' in Paris, adding an artistic element to 'walking in cities'.

Academically speaking, Relph in 1970 (Relph, 1970) explored the first connections between phenomenology and geography. He wrote (1970, 193): [A]ll knowledge proceeds from the world of experience and cannot be independent of that world". As (Seamon, 2013) summarized; Relph

opened the discussion of geography being merely a quantitative study by introducing qualitative methods and phenomenology in order to understand the relationship between humans and nature and thereby expanding the traditional field of geography. Malpas (2009, p. 31) takes this way of looking at the (social) world a step further by introducing the 'locality of being' concept: "It is through our engagement with place that our own human being is made real, but it is also through our engagement that place takes on a sense and a significance of its own".

2.3 Research on the move

The new mobilities paradigm and phenomenology in geography (and other social sciences) are therefore academically intertwined. Evans & Jones (2008) further support this intertwining by stating that place and the embodiment through place is "vital" in mobilities research. Solnit (2001), Ingold (2004) and Wylie (2006) have in some ways continued the Baudelaire's flaneuring by conducting research while being mobile, all three of them have done research while walking or being in motion in a 'human powered' way. They all concluded – in a phenomenological tradition – that being in motion has created a different kind of engagement with the world and therefore different kinds of knowledge and identities. They are not the only researchers who have conducted research while being in motion; (Edensor, 2003) did explorations of mobility by commuting by car, (Edensor & Holloway, 2009) researched Ireland by a touring coach, (Hall, 2006) walked through a city, and (Furness, 2007) researched cycling communities in London.

2.4 Walking in geography

As a couple papers mentioned above have proofed, is that human powered mobility can be a great way to explore places and urban 'scapes'. In geography there has been a well-established field that revolves around 'walking the city' (Middleton, 2011). Middleton (2011) writes about the role of walking and pedestrian movement as a way of reading, knowing and experiencing the urban space. de Certeau (1984) even states that walking is a way of urban emancipation, a theory on lived space. At some point, walking becomes a form of art, a medium to engage with the urban world. In that sense, Baudelaire's poetry of walking in a city comes back again in this way of doing research and understanding the urban place.

2.5 Cycling in geography

Another form of human powered motion is cycling. Spinney (2009) provided a clear overview on the growing relation between cycling and geography (Spinney, 2009). As he demonstrates most of the research done on cycling is on the 'rational' variables, as travel choice, distance and why people do or don't cycle. Cycling in geography is in some ways still a very 'quantitative' geographical field, in need of a "Relph-ification", going back to how Relph introduced phenomenology into geography. The methodological 'toolkit' as Spinney argues within cycling and geography has been full of quantitative models, analysis and surveys.

There has however been a shift emerging within this field, focusing on identities constructed around cycling (Fincham, 2004) (Fincham, 2006) (Fincham, 2007), (Kidder, 2005) , (Cox, 2005).

These papers have focused on an ethnographic research into cycling culture and Fincham focused on bike messenger culture. There are multiple other papers focusing on cycling and urban space (Barnfield & Plyushteva, 2015), (Aldred, 2013) but cycling has rarely been considered a way of continuing the tradition of walking in geography. The tradition of walking called 'flaneuring' can be eloquently extended towards 'velo-flaneuring', or cyclo-geography.

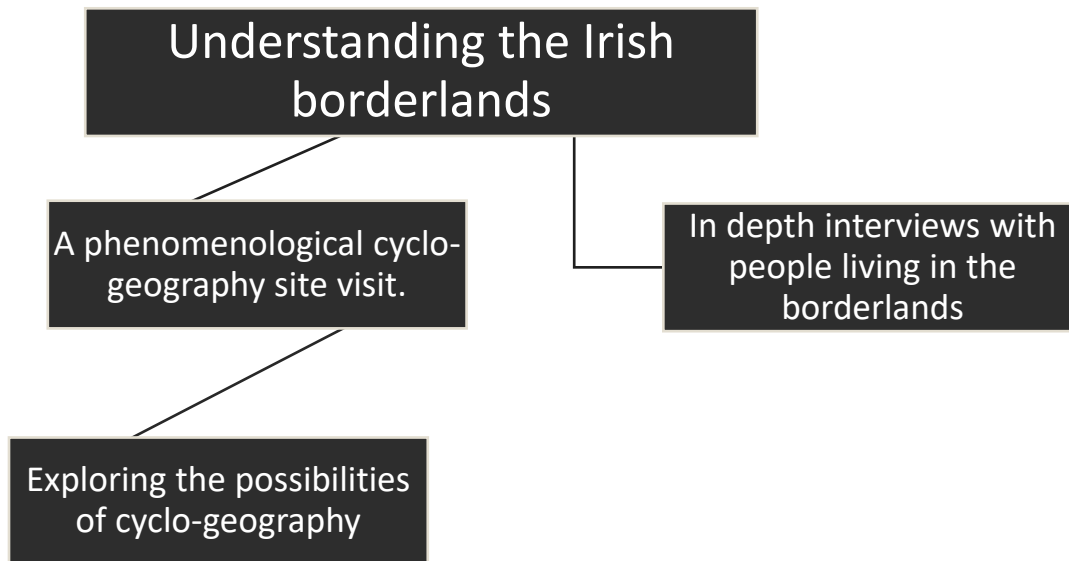
2.6 Cyclo-geography

Cycling as well as walking provides a full body stimulation of the place; the smells, the physical layout, the sounds, the sights, all comes together too when cycling. It's therefore a logical addition to the field of mobile academia. The bicycle is a medium through which the physical world manifests itself in the body; if the landscape is inclining, the cycling becomes more difficult. If there is a constant tailwind, cycling becomes more easier. The bicycle therefore intertwines the human body with the landscape, cycling forces the body to read the landscape, to experience the landscape, to some extent dance with the landscape; constantly adapting rhythms of movement to the layout of the land. The sounds and smells in contrast to motorized forms of mobility are stimulating the body, being on a bicycle still exposes you to the lived land. The pace is slow enough to fully experience the place but quick enough to cover more distances.

Even more so, it provides a practical alternative to walking; as a cyclist you are still slow travelling but quick enough to cover a lot more distance than walking. When it comes to a phenomenology of the borderlands of Ireland-Northern Ireland, with a distance of 450km, cycling is a viable and extremely useful way of conducting a research. It fits within the mobility paradigm, the humanistic tradition of geography and is an extension to existing human powered mobility researches. It has the added benefit that cycling can cover the entire borderlands region, only enhancing the academic value of cycling through scapes. Therefore this research is called a 'cyclo-geography' into the borderlands of Ireland-Northern Ireland.

3. Research methodology

The conducted research is based on the following model:



In an attempt to understand the borderlands; a triangulation method has been applied. This involved a site visit of the borderland by bicycle, in depth interviews with inhabitants of the borderlands and a theoretical exploration of the concept of 'lived borderland'. This is to embed the insiders perspective of the people living in the borderlands and my own outsiders perspective in a theoretical approach. To use this method and to accomplish the goal of the research the following research question and sub question are used.

3.1 Research questions

- ❖ To what extent can we understand through a cyclo-geography methodology how the Irish border has influenced the creation of identities in the border region and how will Brexit alter these identities in the light of the peace processes?
 - How has the border shaped live throughout recent history?
 - How does the inhabitants of the borderland interact with the border in their daily lives?
 - What are the views, hopes, fears and feelings on the Irish Border in terms of the Brexit for the inhabitants of the border lands and the peace processes?

- To what extent is it possible to re-conceptualize the Irish-Northern Irish border?

3.2 Research strategy and research material

When it comes to the research material and strategy, different types of conducting research are used. As explored above, a cyclo-geography visit has been proposed to explore how the borderlands present themselves to an 'outsider'. Conducting qualitative interviews with people living along the border, has given insight on how the people interact in their daily lives with the border, constructing an idea about the borderlands. I found these people while cycling along the border, stopping at border towns at both sides and then conduct a semi-structured interview with certain topics but not fixed questions about the border and their experience.

The strategy used here has been of 'humble research'. I do understand my prejudices and that I have a limited perspective of the borderlands. However, because I covered the entire borderlands, about 450km of impressions, which gave me an indication of the borderlands for an outsider. Within the interviews, the people told their story instead of complementing my ideas. They are the true inhabitants of the borderlands and therefore their insider's perspective and stories are built on much more experience than mine. My experiences combined with their experiences tell the story of the borderland of Ireland and Northern-Ireland.

3.3 Research planning

Time table

February (2017)	research proposal/ methodology of cyclo-geography.
March	Entire research proposal .
April	Conceptualizing the different themes of interviews, the border study and the cyclo-geography.
May	2-18 May site visit of the border. Rest of May writing down the data.
June	Analyze the data and work on concept version and use feedback of concept version to finalize the project.
July	Finishing the project. Establish www.cyclo-geography.com where a forum will be made for similar researches.

3.4 Cycling route

The cycling route was approximately along the itinerary on the map below. The entire border is according to Google Maps about 350 kilometers. From a cyclist perspective, this is a distance which can be covered easily in 5 days. However due to the nature of the research and the constant crossing, this will took of course more time. As there is no clear road following the

border, the followed route was constantly hopping back and forth between the two sides of the border. Besides that, the border towns near the border are relevant for this research too. In these border towns the interviews were conducted with the inhabitants. Examples of border towns are:

- Warrenpoint (UK) and Omeath (IRE)
- Newry (UK) and Dundalk (IRE)
- Crossmaglan (UK) and Castleblaney (IRE)
- Aughnacloy (UK) and Monaghan (IRE)
- Rosslea (UK) and Clones (IRE)
- Belcoo (UK) and Blacklion (IRE)
- Garrison (UK) and Belleek (IRE/UK)
- Pettigo (UK) and Corradoeey (IRE)
- Castlederg (UK)
- Strabane (UK)
- Londonderry~Derry (UK)

These border towns are selected because of their proximity to the border and some of them were coupled because of the proximity to the border. The reason to include the nationality of the border town is not to make a statement or an deductive research design. It's a mere jurisdictional division in order to clarify on which side the town of the border is located. The map below shows the approximate route.

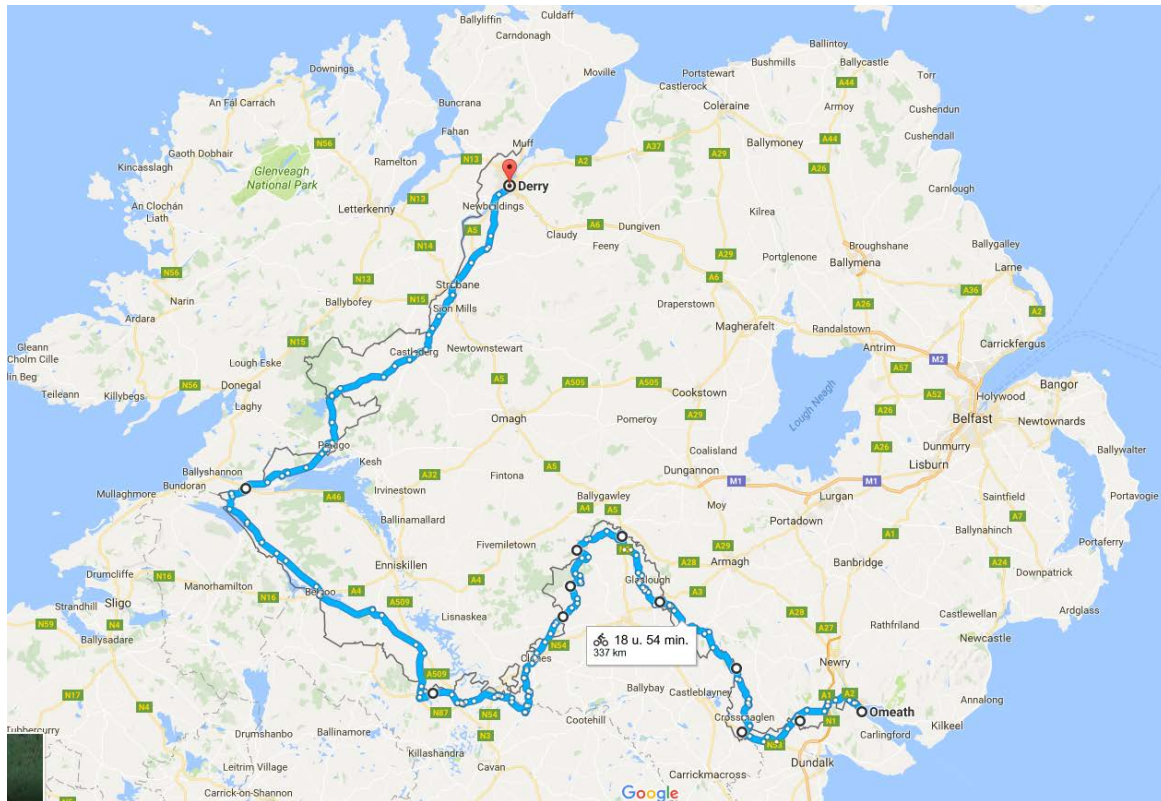


Figure 2: approximate cycling route. Map made by author, data by Google Maps.

This proposed cycling route was not final. As I cycled along the border, I found different paths leading to different places, even different towns than researched before. Flexibility is key in order to ‘flaneur’ the borderlands. Also local information given by inhabitants about certain places and routes were most helpful finding towns and respondents than a pre-defined route on Google Maps.

3.5 Interview technique

Past

In order to fully understand life at the borderlands, one must look into different time segments. As history shaped the present, the first part of the interview dealt with the past. Through a list of historic events happening along the border combined with local historic moments the respondent was asked to comment on the events from his/her own personal experience and the feeling in his/her community. As mobility was crucial in this research, different spatial historic events per city have been used.

Schematically, the interview conducted along the following pictured table. The past was questioned with three important events that were all momentous for the Irish border in recent history. The Troubles was the most important event at the border in recent history, that is why

it was subdivided in three categories that came forth from the literature that were important for the conflict and the border.

The Good Friday agreements were the peace treaties signed in 1998 effectively ending the decades long conflict. The agreement acknowledged that the majority from the people in Northern Ireland wished to remain part of the United Kingdom and also that a 'substantial section' of the people in Northern Ireland wished to bring about a United Ireland. Hereby formally legitimizing the grievances of the Republicans and also accepting that Northern Ireland was officially part of the United Kingdom. This event has therefore had a great impact on the people living along the border and it's vital for the general understanding to question the feelings of the inhabitants on this event.

Another dimension that has been put forth by (Coakley & O'Dowd, 2005) is the European reconciliation funding. Over 1,2 billion euro's has been invested into cross border programs. On paper successful, but it is also interesting to track what the opinions of the inhabitants on this; the funding for these programs will most likely be stopped when the U.K. leaves the European Union in 2019.

Present

To understand the present relation with the border, the respondent was asked about his/her (social) mobility. This was done to understand where the respondent was going, where his/her social networks are located and through this information if the border can be analyzed if it is still present in the habitus and fields of inhabitants of the borderlands. It is known that spatial mobility in many societies can be used as an indicator for a person's contact with, and knowledge of, the outside world. In this research it is of interest to see to what extend cross border contact is made. It also helps to view a person's belonging to a certain place and therefore helps to construct a spatial image of the borderland.

Future

The near future for the borderlands of Ireland might be the most pivotal time since the partition of Ireland in 1923. As the general debate focusses on judicial and economic dimensions of the border, this research as discussed before has rather focussed on the borderlands as a lived space, finding the emotions, the feelings of the inhabitants of the border. In order to research feelings about the future, a provocation is used as a research method. Pangrazio (2017) wrote an interesting piece on critical methodology and stated that through "Provocation might therefore inculcate a process of mutual learning between researcher and participant that is, in many respects, dependent on the critical reflexivity that takes place during the research process." This fits into my wish as a researcher to let the respondent tell his or her story, instead of confirming my 'expert' knowledge. Pangrazio also further states that through this method, the participant becomes a creative agent in the knowledge production. Therefore giving the respondent

provocative (yet ethical) statements to comment on, is a highly suitable way to understand their feelings towards the future of the borderlands.

By stating 'Brexit won't have an impact on the borderlands', the respondent was asked to review his/her opinion on the fact if it would have an influence. If it happens to have an influence, which is to expected from the literature, then the respondent is asked in what way. This information is key to answer the third sub question.

Some fear that Brexit will also influence the peace treaty of 1998, therefore the respondent was asked to make a comment on this as well. This is to gain an understanding if the Irish conflict might re-ignite because of the Brexit in some form or another. Some Republicans see Brexit as an opportunity to pursue a re-united Island, because the majority of Northern Ireland voted in favor of remain. This respondent was asked to review this statement to gain an insight in if it's possible, desirable or that the differences between Northern Ireland and Ireland are too big to bridge. This also would give an insight into possible identity differences between the two sides of the border.

The statement 'the border should be closed' would seem rather strange statement to used, but it provokes the respondent to think about the connectivity on both sides of the border. It would also give an insight in the cross-border spatial practices of the inhabitants.

However flexibility, just like with the velo-flaneuring, was key in the gathering of knowledge. Much of the interviews were semi-structured and followed the natural flow of stories by the respondents. Sensitivity to the personal histories and memories was also important, as some respondents went through very traumatic events.

Past	The Troubles Border controls Violent conflict Cross border informal contact Good Friday agreements European subsidies for reconciliation
Present	(Social) mobility
Future	Brexit won't have an impact on the borderlands.

	<p>The good Friday agreements are in peril because of the Brexit.</p> <p>“Ireland should reunite into one country”.</p> <p>“The border should be closed”.</p>
--	---

Figure 3: Schematic table of the interview guide.

4. Border studies

'La géographie, ça sert d'abord à faire la guerre' (Lacoste, 1976).

Border studies have gone through a transformation last decades. In the wake of globalization and a strong doses of naivety, border researchers imagined a new 'borderless world' (Johnson, et al., 2011) (Wilson & Donnan, 2011). After the events of 9/11, the war on terrorism and therefore the strong securitization of the border, contemporary border studies now are more interested in the social construct, the delimitation and how these 'borderlands' interact with the daily lives of people (Newman, 2006). As Johnson et al point out (2011), borders no longer are lines on paper, but manifest themselves through interaction and state related practices like culture, language, politics, economy and legislation. This synergy of every day practices and social/state institutions are at the heart of border studies; therefore using Giddens structure theory is a helpful tool in the wider production and reproduction of territoriality, state power and agency of borders. Borders are the manifestations of power over space by mostly state institutions (Wilson & Donnan, 2012). Borders are therefore means of structure actively producing identities, sense of place and must always be seen in context of power (Massey, 2005) (Allen, 2009). Within border studies there is also a renewed interest in the people living in borderlands, in what way their daily lives is shaped by the border (Alvarez, 1995) (Zartman, 2010). This predominantly ethnographic research looks to the agency of people dealing with the structure of the border. How local processes of inhabitants of the borderlands (agencies) interact with global processes constituting that border (Allen, 2012) (Roitman, 2005). Researching the interactions that people have with the border is therefore a great way to understand the borderland manifests itself.

Besides that, critical border studies try to focus on practices and –imaginary- performances that consolidate a border instead of a mere existing line. This notion would help to re-conceptualize the dominant discourse on borders and could be a helpful tool in analyzing the Irish case, where the border is open and there are no longer signs of border crossing. Stepping away from analyzing the border in terms of visibility and physical design, this shift towards critical border studies is an interesting tool to understand the border region. On top of that, as Gielis and Van Houtum argue, 'border-dwellers' can problematize the traditional 'homogenous nation state form' concept (Gielis & Van Houtum, 2012). Especially in the Irish case, with the open border and the increased mobility plus the conflict over independence in Northern Ireland, the concept of border-dwellers could indeed problematize the traditional paradigm of the Northern Irish state.

Spatially borders are formed according to Parker & Vaughan-Williams (2012) by a continuum and borders are understood as control over movement, services and goods instead of the classic 'line in the sand' paradigm. Also in the Northern Irish case, especially in the wake of Brexit, re-conceptualizing the dominant border idea is crucial in understanding the impact of the Brexit on

the border areas. As much of the current debate on the border is about movement of goods, people and services.

To theoretically embed the identity issue of 'border dwellers' in the Irish case a framework by Wilson and Donnan could be helpful. Wilson and Donnan (1998, p.14) propose a framework of border populations. A typology to highlight the dimension of the border in communities. These are:

- (1) those whose ethnic ties extend across the border as well as inward within the state;
- (2) those whose ethnic ties extend across the border, but distinguish them from the other members of their state; and
- (3) those who belong to the national majority and have no cross-border ethnic links.

The second category might be helpful in analyzing the identity of the Catholic minority at the border in Northern Ireland. As they might feel more connected to Ireland than to Northern Ireland. With this research the Northern Irish border community could be typified with this distinction. Besides the Catholic community, the Protestant community at the border might have another sense of belonging when it comes to the border and nations. This is something to keep in mind when addressing these topics during the interviews.

Borders are becoming 'in flux', moving, less certain. Through the post-modern approach borders are an element of a world full of shifting identities, unable to be trapped in the general notion of a traditional nation state. Border can be analyzed as a social construct or a mirror of society, in the past and present (Kolossoff, 2005). Border must therefore be approached as an element, as a manifestation of ethnic or national identity. As the consolidation of the Irish border happened in context of imperialism and independence, this is an important perspective to use. Further Kolossoff argues that it's important to understand the boundary affects the daily lives and how a self-identification is caused by the border.

Understanding a border therefore goes way beyond 'opening an atlas and see where the line is drawn', it requires a thorough understanding of the complex identity issue created around a border. It needs to step away from a state centric view towards a bottoms up approach on the lived space, as the border region is created by a state of 'flux'. Performances, practices, sense of belongings, are just a couple dimensions that constitute a border, not a line in the sand. Therefore researching the spaces of the border must be done from a bottoms up approach. Combining ethnographic research and experiencing spaces of flux in the borderlands is an interesting way to be rooted within the afore mentioned theoretic framework of border studies. The traditional approach to understanding a border falls short in the Irish case, where the border is physically absent, proving even more how a bottoms up approach helps to understand the border. It's important to keep in touch with the traditional paradigm, as some of these dimensions like geo-

politics, nation state, jurisdictions will influence the Brexit debate and therefore the border region. However the main focus for the research can be found in the critical border studies and how borders manifest themselves through social representation, identities from the post-modern approach.

5 Irish- Northern Irish border

5.1 The Irish border

As with many international borders, the consolidation and shape of a border are to be found in historic processes. But as Rankin (Rankin, 2005) states in the first sentence of his paper on the Irish border; “The Irish border is undoubtedly one of the most atypical of international boundaries.” (p. 1). The creation, construction and the consolidation of the Irish border knows dimensions of conflict, religious identities, imperialism, unionism, ‘Republicism’, civil war and physical geographical features. As Coakly and O’Dowd (2005) stress that the construction of the Irish border in 1920’s must be viewed in larger context of imperial fragmentation and nation building. It must be seen in a post-World War context which reshaped much of the atlas in the world.

5.2 Geophysical processes

But before diving into the consolidation of the border and the Irish civil war revolving around that border, it is crucial to understand underlying geophysical and social processes of centuries ago that helped to shape the border region as it is today.

The first step into the creation of the Irish border can be found in geophysical processes that created a natural subtle divide in the Ulster region. As this map below (Graham, 1997) shows there is a strong link between the Irish border and the South Ulster Drumlin belt. The word drumlin is derived from the Irish word “droimnin” meaning the littlest ridge. These ‘ridges’ or hills in shapes of half buried eggs are created in the glacial period by glacial sediment. These drumlins are often found in drumlin fields, as is the case for the South Ulster Drumlin belt. This small ridges created therefore a soft natural border between the Northern part and the Southern part of the island.

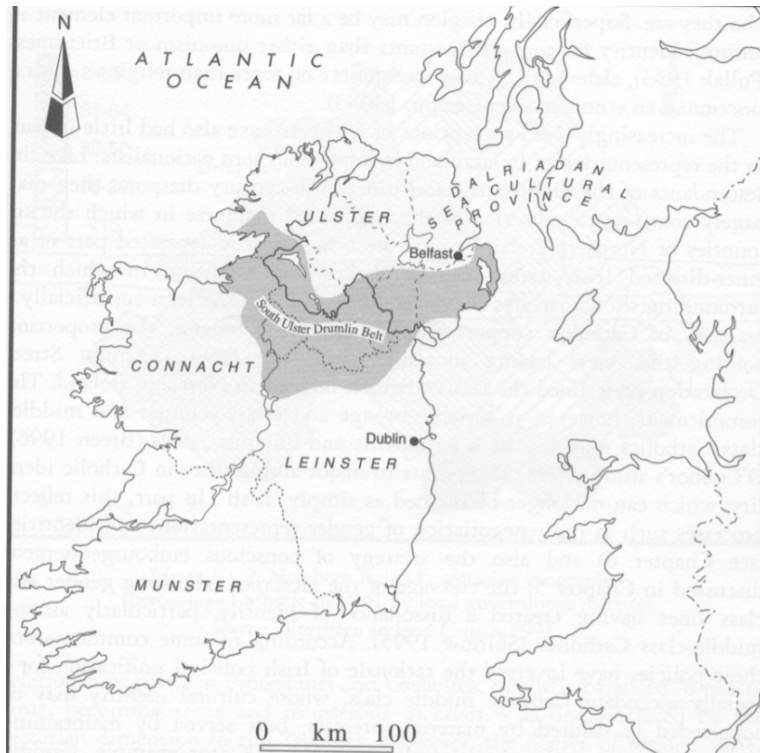


Figure 4: the Ulster drumlin belt.

Another physical feature that influenced the location of the border is the East to West orientation (Rankin, 2005). Because of the close proximity to Scotland, this sparked migration from the main island to the Ulster region. Due to this Drumlin belt, these migrants to the Irish island tended to stay spatially fixed in the North-East. This processes continued throughout the 15th and 16th century where migrants from the main island were predominantly British (Renkin, 2005).

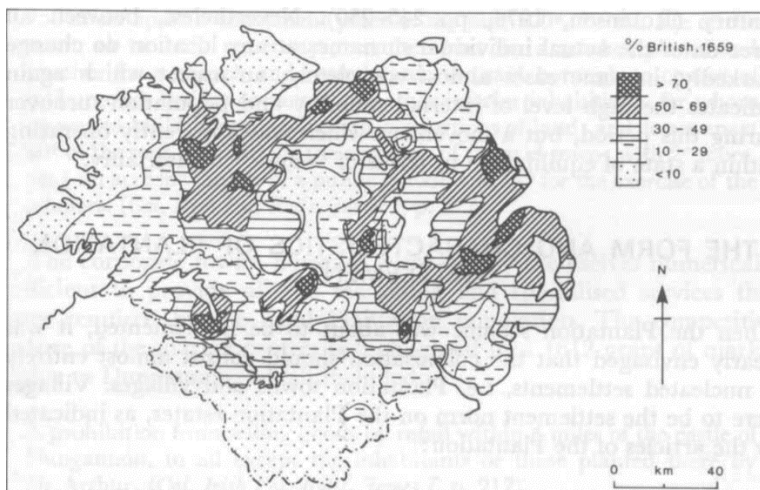


Figure 5: British settlements in the Ulster region circa 1659.

This map of the Ulster region (North-Eastern part of the island) above by (Renkin, 2005, p. 6) shows that already in 1659 the majority of the people living in the Ulster region were from the British isles. This region became one of the most affluent British provinces due to plantations that spread throughout this region (Renkin, 2005).

However, already in 1641 sectarian violence erupted between the migrants from the British island and the local inhabitants. The process of self-victimization of Catholic and Gaelic landowners against new English and Protestant settlers revolved around the migration and land grabbing of the latter. These were historically formed and rooted deep into the sense of Catholic grievances against the English and Protestants (Patterson, 2013). Fear for uprising and an Irish rebellion were in that time already highly rooted in the dominant discourse of the British rule (Pringle, 1985).

5.3 Creation of the border

Violence erupted in the beginning of the 20th century over the 'home rule' in Ireland within the United Kingdom. As the imperial power of the United Kingdom diminished, a solution was proposed where the Irish people could have a own government, a law called the 'home rule'. However, Unionists (mostly Protestants living in the Ulster region) feared that this home rule was a stepping stone to the full independence of the Irish island and were against such a political body. This matter was postponed because of the First World War.

In early 1919 the IRA was formed, the Irish Republican Army, which mission was to seek independence from the United Kingdom. This tumultuous time reached a boiling point with the implementation of the partition in 1921-1922 where the island would be split between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, both with their respective governments but under different rule (Renkin, 2005). Here the Unionist would remain part of the United Kingdom and the Republicans would be able to form a own nation.

This government of Ireland act in 1920 created these two governments and an antiparliamentary council of Ireland to work on shared concerns, such as the border. The border was constructed through much of the area that was known as the Ulster in the North-East of the island, but it also cut through the Protestant minority in the southern counties of the Ulster. This created political minorities on both sides of the border, Protestant Unionists in Ireland and Nationalists in North Ireland as part of the United Kingdom. However, on both sides of the border were two distinct majorities, the Republicans in the newly formed Ireland and the Unionists in the north east of the Island. The border was created by this council to territorialize the part of the entire island that the British felt comfortable enough to control, because of the ethnic majority in the Northern part of the Island.

The stark differences between the two sides of the border in terms of socio-economic development in the inter-bellum period deepened the gulf between the two sides. In 1948 the

Northern Irish prime minister issued a statement that the action of Dublin to end ties with the United Kingdom created 'a yawning gulf between the North and the South which is unbridgeable' (Coakley & O'Dowd, 2005, p. 49). This exemplifies greatly how the border has been thoroughly dividing between the two communities on both sides. A identity division that was exacerbated during the years to come during the troubles in the 1960's. This gulf between the two sides of the border was further deepened by the religious differences between predominantly Catholic Ireland and Protestant Northern Ireland.

5.4 Conflict on the island

In the beginning of the troubles in the 1960's the border became more securitized. Roads were closed and the British military created heavily fortified checkpoints. This was a response to the 'IRA's assault on the Northern Irish state' (Patterson, 2013). The border played an important role in the strategic success of the IRA as more than half of the IRA's active service units were frequently crossing territories and therefore nations to pursue their interests (Patterson, 2013b). The Republic of Ireland became, according to the British government a safe haven for the IRA guerilla fighters. The border was much more viewed as a frontier and treated in such a way by the Northern Irish and British government. The capability of the Irish nation state of the monopoly of violence was frequently challenged by the British government because of the IRA groups operating in the territory of Ireland. Besides that, the British frequently challenged the territorial integrity during the conflict by conducting cross border operations.

5.5 The borderlands

As Patterson (2013) argues in his introduction; the border and the borderlands has been largely neglected in literature on the Troubles. Already in the 1920's the border became a place of violent and conflict. Catholic militants set Protestant churches and farm houses on fire and Unionists formed self-defense groups. In his book Patterson states that the border areas were plunged into near civil-war conditions in the years following, already 40 years before the start of the Troubles.

The 1920's and the 1960's role of the border helped to strengthen the intractability of the conflict between the North and the South. But with the rise of the European Union, the notion of 'shared-sovereignty' and transnational cooperation slowly shaped the conflict. Special reconciliation programs funded by the European Union helped to reach the good Friday agreements in 1998.

But Coakley and 'O Dowd (2005) do write that there is a strong need for qualitative and quantitative overview of how the border has isolated or joined the two sides with the heightened intensity of the trans-national cooperation networks last decades.

5.6 View from below

As the border played such an important role in the conflicts of both decades and the inhabitants of the borderlands suffered a great deal, it's important to step away from grand narratives of

history and geopolitical relations and move towards a bottoms up approach to the border. Are the strongly rooted grievances of the past in the borderlands 'solved'?

It is a rhetorical question that comes back into the contemporary debate because of the big political turmoil named the Brexit. Although the current Brexit minister stated in a press conference that it wouldn't pursue a hard border between Ireland and Northern Ireland, old grievances might reappear. According to Berthie Ahern, a prominent Irish leader who helped to secure the Good Friday agreements the Brexit would seriously jeopardize the reconciliation project (Guardian, 2016 et 2017) . It remains as of yet unclear on how the border might be shaped, as different governmental bodies state different ideas. The wish is to keep the border open, but negotiations on the import duties, free movement of (European) citizens, agricultural subsidies, are still to be started and formalized (Guelke, 2017) .

5.7 Social and academic relevancy

It is socially and academically highly valuable to explore the borderlands and conduct qualitative research into inhabitants of the borderlands. Their grievances and ideas about the border and the daily interaction with the border are important to take into account for the negotiations. As political events unfold in such a rapid pace, little scientific research has been done into the inhabitants of the borderlands and their view on Brexit. Besides some news articles, nothing is yet to be published in terms of ethnographic border research with the Brexit dimension. Most of the recent published articles involving the Brexit dimension about the border focus on the aforementioned concepts of political negotiations (Neal, et al., 2016). This has created a scientific opportunity to conduct an ethnographic research into the borderlands of the Irish border with the Brexit as a central theme to the research.

6. Data collection

6.1 Interviews

During the sixteen day site visit I talked to a couple dozen people, of which seven were recorded and eight were noted down. The rest of the conversations were brief and helped me forming an idea about the borderlands, however since they are not recorded they won't be taken into account into the analysis. Because of the informal and on the spot nature of the interviews, the idea of mind mapping became too difficult to realize. The spontaneity in the interviews helped to shape beautiful conversations and stopping this natural flow of stories with mental mapping would have been of negative effect. Instead, I focused on addressing all the themes of the research and asked for personal stories to enhance the interviews. As the interviews followed a semi structured scheme, the topics addressed were plentiful but could be categorized in different themes. These themes all reflect on the research question. The emphasis on different themes were unexpected but in hindsight logical. Because I spoke to so many people who have interacted with the border and lived through the Troubles, much of their personal stories were about experiences in the Troubles. Therefore the majority of the talks revolved around the Troubles. Keeping that in mind during the talks, I moved the conversation to the Brexit, live now, the European Union and the pre-troubles. The different themes are as followed:

- Pre-troubles
- Life during the Troubles
- European Union
- Life currently
- Brexit

During the analysis it became clear that two more themes could be added, more about the analysis later. These themes are:

- Border identity
- Sense of place

6.2 Site visit

Besides the interviews, as discussed before, this research also explores the possibilities of cyclo-geography and understanding and experiencing places from the perspective of the bicycle. During cycling, I spent a lot of hours philosophizing and thinking about the borderlands and the Brexit. Every day I would write down these ideas and notes to form a trip diary, incrementally building my perspective from the bicycle. In the second part of the analysis I will elaborate on these field notes, give my own impression and help to conceptualize cyclo-geography. This analysis will follow a chronological frame, because my idea on the borderlands grew

chronologically as I became more immersed by and taken in the borderlands. Being in the borderlands, sleeping in the borderlands, eating in the borderlands and cleaning myself with the border – water border that is -, I immersed myself completely in this region. Many thoughts popped up and were lost again with the wind, but helped to shape the recorded notes and ideas. This will be the second part of the analysis of the borderlands and will deal with my outsiders perspective.

7. The stories from the borderlanders.

Note from the author: In the appendix a map can be found with all the border towns and villages mentioned in the coming chapters.

7.1 Life at the borderlands: Pre-troubles.

2nd World War.

"I remember looking up to the skies as a 10 year old boy. I could see German fighter planes flying in formation towards Belfast to drop their bombs."

It's the memory that goes furthest back in time from the people I have spoken to. This man lived in a small border town called Mullan village, North East of Monaghan in the Republic. His name is Seamus and he lived for about 85 years in the town, of which 25 years were alone because the roads were closed off and the village became isolated from its hinterlands.

Strikingly, the North was part of the United Kingdom and therefore in full on war modus. The industry and agriculture of Northern Ireland was directed towards the war effort of the United Kingdom. This while the Republic of Ireland remained neutral. This man therefore could hop between European World War Two belligerents and a neutral country by merely crossing the bridge adjacent to his house. The dynamic at the border changed with this too; because of tight rationing food was smuggled from the Republic in the South into the North, vice versa compared to pre-World War where a lot of goods from the North made their way down south (The Irish borderlands , 2015). Economically speaking the war effort created pull factors for workers in the South to fill in the gap of the Northern industry. This already reflects on the tightly interwoven economic activity around the border. The border space also represented a conflicted area, as it did permit a corridor for Allied planes to fly over, made weather reports available that helped with the success of D-day and indirectly helped with the work force of Northern Ireland while officially being neutral.

Only 20 years after the partition Northern Ireland was dragged into a conflict by the United Kingdom in the 1940's. Over 38,000 people from Northern Ireland volunteered to join the British armed Forces. This reflects on the belonging from 'Ulster men' (as Northern Irish men would call themselves) to join the English war effort and therefore be part of the United Kingdom. It did meet some political opposition by the Catholic church and the Nationalists parties in Northern Ireland. Who argued that the United Kingdom didn't have the political legitimacy to facilitate and expand conscription and volunteering (Barton, 2010). Even in context of the 2nd World War, there was a clear division between the two communities in Northern Ireland. One feeling British and

joining the war effort, who were mostly from a Protestant background, and the other openly questioning the legitimacy of the British rule, who usually had a Catholic background.

Another 2nd World War element that came forward during the interviews was the father of a respondent in Belleek. This father was a RAF pilot from Wales, who was stationed in the Donegal corridor. He died at a young age, but according to the respondent, if he'd would have stayed in this area, he would have been a target by nationalist militia groups. These men didn't accept English people in their villages. As a woman in Dundalk reflected on this; *"there was a massive stigma on marrying English people"*. It seems that outsiders and especially from the British isles were seen as occupants and wouldn't be accepted in the community. Marrying these 'outsiders' is therefore viewed as not done, it reflects on that fact that there was a massive divide in the society, also back then, between Catholics with a Nationalist background and Unionists/Loyalists with a Protestant background, viewing themselves as British. This divide was supported through marrying within the same group.

"Pre-troubles"

Many respondents categorized the history of the border into "pre-Troubles" and "Troubles" when telling their stories. The borderlands – as many in the world – form the periphery of the country. The majority of the industry and the economic activity was centered in the big cities like Dublin, Belfast, Londonderry/Derry and Sligo. The borderlands were mostly agricultural, with poor grounds. The region has always been deprived of economic activity. As one of the respondents told me in Castleblaney; *"Smuggling was the way forward at the border"*. Butter, flour, cigarettes and also pigs were taken from the North into the South. There were some very creative stories of taking goods from one side to the other. One respondent told me that he and his parents would go bare feet into the North, buy shoes and return to the customs 'with nothing to declare'. A Protestant community worker told me with joy in his eyes how he had to chase pigs across the field in the midst of the night while his friends watched out for the customs.

As border are also the edges of political entities, it creates spaces of informal – often classified as illegal – activities. The control over these areas are often only centered at the physical line of the border in forms of custom huts, patrols and blockades. The spaces outside these centralized points of control are essentially in the void of political control. The state is very much present at the border crossing, but a couple miles into the lands it remains blissfully absent. The border follows quite a lot of fields and rivers, where the political entity is even more absent. In these 'open' spaces, much of the illegal activities would have been done.

Smuggling

Virtually everyone I spoke to referred to this part of the history's border as great for smuggling. One man even went so far that smuggling was the only real economic activity at the border. This was echoed by the respondent from Dundalk who said that many people got extremely wealthy

because of smuggling. It was economically very attractive to smuggle because everything in the North was cheaper. One respondent in Monaghan told me that a lot of smuggling happened on the bicycle. Bicycle frames were stuffed with cigarettes and then cycled across to be sold in the South. This is one of the first elements on how the border and the bicycle are intertwined in history.

Much of the mobility around the border also happened by the bicycle as cars and fuel were generally too expensive. It was easy to illegally transverse into the other political domain by carrying the bicycle on the shoulder and cross through fields; the bicycle helped in easy accessible mobility and proved to be a vital instrument in the smuggling of these liminal spaces of the Republic and United Kingdom.

According to one respondent, the smuggling done also helped to pay education for the younger generation, so in that way the border helped people in their social mobility, escaping poverty. If this happened on a large scale is unknown, but it does reflect on the daily interaction of the inhabitants with the border and its economy, unique to these spaces. The border in some ways was not only a clear divide between political entities, it was a dimension in the socio-economic mobility for people living close to it. It proved to be an opportunity, a chance to change their live through this border.

Children were also used for smuggling, as the mayor of Castleblaney told me that sometimes liquor or cigarettes would have been put under the seat of them in the car because customs wouldn't search children.

It seemed that this story and the story of the old Protestant community worker shed some light on a certain playfulness at the border, times were tough but through smuggling people could get an agency in their lives. The border provided an opportunity to escape the rigid economic structures that kept most of Ireland poor. Through these small illegal actions of cycling, buying clothes, chasing pigs across the fields, using children, people at the border could make a decent living. The border gave them economic power. Now it seems logical that there is a certain nostalgia to that time when people talk about the border during that time. There was less uncertainty, people knew what to expect from the border, how you could shape your lives around the border.

Post World War until the beginning of the Troubles weren't completely peaceful, as the IRA launched 'operation harvest', a guerilla warfare campaign along the border to overthrow British rule in Northern Ireland (English, 2003) . However, with limited success. This period did lay out the groundwork for the coming decades, a time of deeply sectarian violence, intense guerilla warfare and a lot of suffering.

7.2 Life at the borderlands: the Troubles

As the conflict in Northern Ireland became gradually worse, it became clear that the border would play an important role. As many of the IRA militants lived on the South side of the border, they illegally crossed into the North. As one respondent explained to me; *“the border saw an awful lot of cross border violence. For many of the IRA fighters, the South was a safe heaven.”*

The troubles were more a spillover of hundred years of grievances building up than something unexpected. There was already a massive divide in Northern Ireland as one of the respondents told me, which was echoed by many others. The Catholic community in Northern Ireland felt deprived and discriminated by the largely Protestant security forces. The owner of the pub called Roslea Arms in Rosslea told me that he had applied for a government job and everyone called him crazy, just because he was from a Catholic area and Catholic background he would haven't got the job in the Protestant dominated government. The old man in Warrenpoint said something similar, he told that he was constantly harassed being a Catholic teenager by the Protestant police force. As the Catholics were marching in the big cities in Northern Ireland, demanding civil rights, the local police force responded with violence. The same old man in Warrenpoint told me that the moment the Northern Irish police fired on the Catholics in the demonstrations, the Troubles started. These acts of police brutality opened the Pandora box for sectarian violence, where both religious sides formed para-military groups targeting civilians from the other side, killing indiscriminately civilians on base of their religion.

It also helped to 'reborn' the IRA, which wasn't big during the 40's and the 50's. Many Republicans from the South joined the IRA and fought in the North. As a response to this, the British army started to patrol the border areas intensively. Many unauthorized roads were blown up to control the movement of people across the border. Many towns were suddenly cut off from its hinterlands as the stream of mobility was diverted towards certain main roads. Clones, a town that is encapsulated by the border was – as the pub owner in Rosslea eloquently explained – suffocated from its natural flow of people. Castlederg too, a town 50 kilometers South of Londonderry/Derry was closed off almost entirely. Economic activity grinded to a hold in many of these towns, at the south side and at the North side. Castleblaney for example, a town in the Republic of Ireland, was seen as dangerous and part of the North. According to the Protestant community worker I met there, people in the South associated it with the North. Formally a region in peace, became sucked into the conflict of Northern Ireland because of the close proximity at the border. If the customs at Castleblaney closed, it meant that a lot of lorries with goods would have been stuck in Castleblaney. The perception of violence came from both sides of the border, the people in the Republic didn't want to go so close to the border and the people in the North saw Castleblaney as an IRA “nest”. This caused that the UVF, the Ulster volunteer force, a Protestant paramilitary group, to bomb the main square in Castleblaney, killing one bicycle mechanic from Castleblaney. It were terrible times according to the mayor. He himself

grew up in Castleblaney during the troubles and despite being a Catholic, he also was targeted by the IRA who confiscated a car right in front of him and his family.

Changing border

The border itself changed quite dramatically during this time. The British security forces were tightening up the border the beginning years of the Troubles. The author Patrick Mulroe who I spoke to wrote an article about the beginning of the troubles that the border was a quite peaceful area with only 4 incidents a month (Mulroe, 2017). It seems that the border communities were more peaceful and less violent than the bigger cities. This was a stark contrast with the big cities like Belfast and Derry where thousands of people fled from the violence. As the Unionists in Northern Ireland demanded tighter security around the border, roads were blown up or 'cratered', and customs checks became more vigorous. This massively disrupted the daily lives of the people living around the border.

Mulroe continues to argue that the presence of British security forces in these towns aggravated the local Catholic communities. Combined with the context of the Troubles in the big cities, it sparked a lot of nationalism in these communities. The presence of these security forces were seen as an occupation of the former colonizer of Ireland. Deep down all Catholics are nationalists, according to a respondent in Castleblaney, so the clear manifestation of the British political entity in these border areas who were massively disrupting the daily lives deepened the grievances and in turn worsened the conflict in the border. These British soldiers became a symbol for the British empire and therefore the 'occupation'. Targeting these soldiers were of large symbolic importance. It helped to deepen the division between the identities in the country and around the border, where the British soldiers – the Protestants, on the hands of the Unionists – were occupying and disrupting the Catholic – the nationalists – lives. The collective identity of the "Catholics" versus the "Protestants" was therefore further exacerbated and continued the conflict in the decades to come.

The book 'partitioned lives: The Irish borderlands' also mentions that the IRA deliberately targeted Protestant families in an alleged ethnic cleansing of the borderlands. A lot of Protestant families moved away from the dangerous border, more inland to Protestant dominated regions. This protracted military presence in the border areas, to protect the Protestant communities from these attacks.

It's important to note that the securitization of the border did make military sense. The IRA used the South as a safe haven, it left the British security forces powerless as any movement into the south without prior admission can be seen as an incursion into a sovereign country.

In times of the Iron curtain the British and Northern Irish government couldn't completely seal off the border with barbed wire, landmines and fences. It would have been unthinkable to construct such a border in the 'Free West'. The British security forces therefore relied on what

I'd argue is a 'panopticon-ification' of the border. Virtually on every hill of the border – as discussed before, much of the border consisted out of hills – guard towers were built. These guard towers would watch stretches of the border, noting down the number plates of cars that crossed, recording all the cross border mobility. As the inhabitants couldn't see if these border posts were manned or not, it created a situation of a feeling that you're constantly being watched. Through the internalization of power from the state into the body of the 'border crosser', the security forces hoped to control the movement of people along the border.

Customs and security forces.

The customs intensified with the Troubles too, as the woman from Belleek told me:

So when I was going home late, even in Christmas time, with all the presents wrapped up and you were meant to declare what you brought. So you could have a nasty guy or a nice guy on. It was a bit of a pain, I was so glad they got rid of that.

It meant that she could sometimes wait for more than an hour to cross the border back home, as she would have received gifts from her family, these could be seen as illegal goods to carry back home. People could wait a long time to cross the border, only if the British security forces were finished with searching the car, the next one could be searched. It reflects on the urge to control the movement of people and goods. Its purpose was to seal off and contain the North, but it did have a dramatic effect on the borderlands this massive securitization.

The massive deployment of security forces also resulted in an increase of assassinations of the police force. Police patrolling the streets were an easy target for IRA ambushes. A police officer represented the state and its core function; the monopoly of violence. By killing police officers it was a direct assault on the state, a violent questioning of the legitimacy. A consequence of this was that the local police didn't go out for calls as they feared being ambushed.

"We were actually doing the work of the police. The police was too afraid to come out to these remote areas." His wife adds: *"Back then, if he was going to it, I never knew if he was going to come back safely."*

The man from Belleek quoted above here worked for 35 years in the local Fire and Rescue department. As illustrated, he and his colleagues were doing much of the police work. It signifies greatly how the dynamic in these border towns were. People got on with their lives, but there was constantly a dangerous looming overhead, from the IRA or from the UVF or from the British security forces. The threat of violence went so far that most of the police was helicoptered in these border towns, because the roads were too dangerous. The risk of ambushes along the roads, and especially roads hugging the border was high. The police generally avoided these roads.

The fact that the police couldn't walk over the streets anymore was echoed in many other places. The shop owner in Dundalk, Republic of Ireland, told me that every time she went to visit her family in the North, she avoided walking near British soldiers, fearing being caught in a bomb attack as collateral damage. Especially during the peak of the Troubles, she visited her family in the North less often because it felt too dangerous.

The couple in Belleek continued to share stories of sectarian violence in their town. In 1988, right across their filling station there were two Protestant contractors shot by the IRA. Their car was stopped and were gunned down point blank. The woman was first on the scene, seeing if she could help with anything. She said it was a complete mess the car.

"Well that night also the phone went, we were harassed by reporters, because there was a shot of the filling station on the TV of where the shooting was. And I answered the phone, it was a very nasty person, just said to me. "See what you have witnessed today, you could be next..." "

The phone call was made by the IRA according to her. She went back home in Sligo – 40 miles down the border- and stayed there for a couple weeks. Even now, when sharing the story it felt uncomfortable for her it seemed. Not only the IRA harassed her she told:

[A]nd that night, this place went in total shutdown. The police, the army, they slept on our porch. We used to have a big bush there, I went down there to close the lights and I could hear something... And all these heads and guns and camouflage popped out the bush. I shocked, all these people who even didn't announce they were there, were all over there hiding in the bushes.

These men were British special forces controlling and searching the scene, looking for any clues of who had killed the contractors. It resembles how the border people were caught in between; their locality of being was the site where the political entity of the United Kingdom became tangible, visually apparent. The police, the customs, the British security forces, they were are symbols. In the narrative of the IRA, the nationalist discourse, these symbols were great targets to challenge the British rule, to 'attack the occupiers' to 'free Northern Ireland'. It shares the same narrative of typical freedom fighters. The IRA saw themselves as freedom fighters, fighting to end a 400 year old colonial rule and oppression by the British. These inhabitants in the border area were caught in between. Their lives spatially intertwined with the symbols of the United Kingdom.

The Irish government.

The Irish government was dragged into this conflict too. In Castleblaney I was talking to a woman who joined the Guardia, the Irish police force. People were assigned to their stations across the country. So Guardia never served local. She explained to me the following:

[A]nd I was told I'd be going to Castleblaney. Everyone was afraid to tell me it was at the border, because they knew I was going to be upset. Eventually they said that I will be stationed at the

border and burst out crying and I told I'm going to be murdered. This is just bandit country, everybody got killed.

She was tasked to control the border from the Irish side, also constantly checking who was crossing the border. She did shifts of 12 hour, in the winter in the summer, in the rain in the sun. It was very hard according to her. She also noted that in Crossmaglan, a town in the North, close to the border, it was also too dangerous for the local police to drive. They were helicoptered in too, like many places along the border. Especially during those moments, the Guardia in the South were asked to control the border crossings, making sure that no IRA fighters would lay an ambush targeting the soldiers and police force near the border. According to her there was a lot of contact between the security forces on both sides of the border. She even said that they had a good relationship with the Northern Irish police. The author Mulroe echoed something similar. He researched the controversial area of contact between the security forces. Officially the Irish Guardia wasn't supposed to talk to the British army, but he found in government papers that there was a lot of illegal contact between the two forces:

And my view is, that there was probably much more discrete contact, hidden cooperation than we know at the time. For example the Irish Guardia weren't allowed to speak to the British army at the time. That was prohibited. Because, Irish police forces would only cooperate with other police forces, not the army. So they wouldn't speak to the British army. But I would have seen evidence in an UK archive that that would happen and also on a regular basis. There was regular discrete contact between the Irish and the British security forces. Which at the time people suspect but didn't know it actually happened.

When diving deeper into this interesting, controversial topic, Mulroe concluded:

They felt that the troubles in the North could potentially destabilize the South, In reality the state feared, let's say 1974, a real possibility of British withdraw. [...] The Irish government actually lobbied against it to make sure the British wouldn't leave Northern Ireland. [The Irish government] doesn't want it, this would cause real trouble. This would have caused more trouble because you would have a Unionist minority and a Nationalists majority and the Unionist minority couldn't accept that.

In other words, the IRA became so successful that the British were planning to withdraw, whereby the Unionist majority in Northern Ireland would possible fight a guerrilla war against the Irish state; spreading the conflict over the entire island. The general notion that the South was a safe haven for IRA fighters doesn't completely live up to the reality during the Troubles.

Besides the fear of a too successful IRA campaign, the troubles must be viewed in a Cold War context too. As there was a significance part of the IRA who were on the left of the political spectrum and had, according to research done by Mulroe, a lot of contact with Eastern European

intelligences. The fear of a communistic uprising IRA was felt very much throughout the Irish government, which also resulted in the Irish government discretely helping the British fighting the IRA.

7.3 Border towns

Not only soldiers were a symbolic target in these border towns, the barracks too. In every town in the North I visited, locals shared their stories of barracks from the Northern Irish police and British security forces being targeted. The old couple living in Warrenpoint for example, lived right across the police barracks. At one point, all their windows and doors were smashed while they were in the house. He was thrown off the staircase and fell on the floor, dazed and confused. Instantly he crawled to a shattered window to check what happened. A bomb was planted across the street and exploded near the Police barracks. Here again, while being Catholic and therefore supposed to be on the IRA side, they were caught in between as collateral damage. Same goes for Belleek, where the police barracks were under attack multiple times. In Rosslea, in the local town pub, I was talking to the owner there. He pointed up the hill which could be viewed from the pub. At the moment there is a wood crafting factory, but during the Troubles it was a heavy fortified army barracks. He said that there were multiple attacks made on the barracks, with rockets, bombs and ambushes.

It seems that much of the 'borderlanders' were trapped in the conflict, however it's important to note that many towns had IRA fighters too. In Dundalk, in the Republic, I spoke to a woman who said that everyone knew IRA fighters, locally. Also in Belleek the couple told me that there were quite a few locals joining the fight. They also noted that these were just small minded indoctrinated workmen. That they had no idea what it was really like and they fell for the propaganda of the IRA.

Many of the people whom I spoke to had similar feelings about the conflict. It were the 'bad old times' or 'life was horrible' or the very dark times. Some of the conversations only touched the topic briefly of the Troubles, as it seemed they some of them were not eager to talk about it. Which reflects on the fact that it was a hard and even traumatic time for many. As a researcher it's best to finish the topic of the Troubles as it was sometimes too painful to talk about it. Especially for people who lived right at the border, they saw a lot of violence. There was just according to the people in Castleblaney a completely different mindset, a different way of thinking, a different way of the society. Everything revolved around the conflict; people were 'fishing' for the religion of the conversation partner. If they'd find out you were immediately categorized as being part of one group. Identities were forced upon the people and the society in general. You were either a Catholic and therefore a supporter of the nationalist cause or a Protestant and therefore supportive of the Unionists. A woman who lived in Sligo and Dublin – two cities in the Republic – told me that religion was never an issue in these towns. It becomes an issue in the North and around the border. You were put into a category, with no exceptions.

The society was extremely divided in these categories and the 'other' was seen as 'different'. Castlederg, a town 5 miles of the border in Northern Ireland, was split between the Catholics and the Protestants. There were no go areas for the Catholics and the Protestants. Merely the religion determined in which part of the town you could dwell, where your social life was. You were beaten up if you went to 'the wrong side of the town'. This is very much the case in Derry/Londonderry too, where even up until today the society is divided between the two sides.

Own dynamic.

The border towns had their very own dynamic in the Troubles compared to the bigger cities of Derry/Londonderry and Belfast in Northern Ireland. The influx of British soldiers controlling the border and the movement of people severely hindered the mobility of these communities. The Irish state played in some ways an awkward role around these border towns as well. That they helped the security forces of Northern Ireland, but could never openly admit it, because the general sentiment in Ireland was against the British.

The borderlands were also overlooked and under researched according to Mulroe and O'Dowd. Journalists from the world were flown into Belfast, where they could make their item, photograph some murals, show the divide in the towns and could be gone in 24 hours. Around the borderlands, it was less tangible, the dynamic was different. People didn't open up as much as in the towns. The division was much less visible. The conflict couldn't be captured in one photograph or in one story. As many said in interviews; the border had its own sort of Troubles. There is a distinction in the conflict between the Troubles in the big cities and the borderlands troubles, the way the conflict was fought, how the IRA and the British security forces used the border as an advantage or disadvantage the way the local inhabitants dealt with it, the way how daily life was disrupted, how people were dragged into the conflict and how the news and the academics covered it.

7.4 Life at the borderlands: Post-troubles

Good Friday agreements.

"I tell you, when the good Friday agreements were signed; I was so happy because having small children... Because I hoped my children didn't have to grow up in such a bigoted society."

"The Good Friday agreements were absolutely brilliant, it stopped people getting killed. It stopped it all, it stopped everybody."

"But now since the peace process and the good Friday agreements, it has been brilliant."

"It made things a lot easier, everything relaxed, everything relaxed."

In 1998 the Good Friday Agreements were signed, stopping almost three decades of sectarian violence. Of course, as said by many the animosity didn't stop overnight, but it relieved the

pressure in the society a lot. The border gradually opened and the process of reconciliation started. The Good Friday agreements were a pivotal chapter in the history of the borderlands.

The man in Belleek did note that it would take at least a couple generations before the '*small mindedness*' goes away. It's still a thing in the society as said by the woman in Dundalk. It doesn't matter like it used to do, but it still is tangible in the air, the religious differences. However, the people at the park run in Castleblaney did concluded that everyone has moved forward tremendously. Communities have bridged now, especially around the border area. There is a lot of cross border contact, working in the South, living in the North or vice versa. It's estimated that there are more than 25,000 border crossings a day. This open border helped to generate a lot of economic activity. The business owners I talked to in Garisson, Belleek, Dundalk, Crossmaglan all said that their business depends on the open border. The open border has created a lot of freedom of movement, which in turn helped to enlarge the areas from which costumer could come from.

Tidal wave of consumption.

As Northern Ireland uses another currency than the Republic of Ireland, the border economy has adapted to this. Virtually everyone would have Euro's and Pounds in their wallet, depending on which side of the border they happen to do groceries. The border therefore also creates an economic tidal wave of consumption. Depending on the exchange rates between the Euro and Pound, the border people 'flow' to one side to do their groceries because it's cheaper. For example, if the Euro is very strong and the Pound very weak, people from the Republic would do their shopping on the other side of the border, where they can buy more for less. The shops have adapted to this, having cash systems that both accept Euro's and Pound. The bigger shops also have a piece of paper on the wall when entering the shop that states 'today's exchange rate is 1 eu = x GBP. One shop in Strabane did its promotion through "one euro is one pound" sale. If one would like to spatialize the borderlands into geographical parameters, shops that accept both currencies would be a good start.

One of the respondents even went so far that right now it's like there is no border, because of the easy crossing, economic connection and cultural/social intertwinement. Farmers for example would have lands on both side of the border now, with cattle crossing the invisible border without regard. Crossings are made easy, this is what every single respondent and persons I talked to echoed. The open border helped to bridge communities, create contact and has 'changed the mentality' of people.

In Castleblaney I was very welcomed by the community, even so that on a Sunday morning, after sleeping at the house of two police officers, I got invited to a Protestant service. So I was in a Protestant service, in the Republic of Ireland and everything was peaceful. Not even 30 years ago, sectarian violence would have made this a dangerous ordeal, but now even the Catholic mayor

joins the last bit of the service to check up with some community members. Afterwards, I have a small chat with the mayor and the reverend. They explain to me that coming years the Catholic church will be renovated and that the Catholic community will be using the Protestant church for the time being. It's one of the best symbols of how the different religious communities have bridged together at the border. The holy house, the church will now be shared by two different religious groups, which would have been absolutely unthinkable for the past 300-400 years. It resembles beautifully how, especially the border communities have bridged and stepped away from the 'us versus them' feeling, towards an inclusive community.

7.5 European Union

One political institution that has played a very big role and will play a decisive role in the future of these borderlands is the European Union. Since 1995 Northern Ireland and also the border counties received 1.3 billion euro's from PEACE I, II, III, through the Structural Funds and Regional Development fund (European Parliament, 2017). This money was used to fund peace projects, where communities from both sides would come together and share their experiences. Two respondents shared the following in a conversation:

"We've got all our churches and all these social benefits by European funding and it brought us all together. We've been on loads of different trips with our communities. We have a traditional Irish group in from Enniskillen playing accordion and they played Orange - Protestant songs, which was very unusual. But they all joined. That was through peace money."

"That money wasn't wasted. We met Ulster Unionists, we met Shin Feinn, we've seen both sides. We wouldn't have done it without the peace money. We wouldn't have the resources to do it."

"It was vital. absolutely and very very well spend. Because it brought people from our church, that would never have, you know that would have never gone on these wee trips or things like that. We were all working together, we had a wonderful time together."

Peace money.

It became very apparent how crucial the European Funding has been in this region. Not only grants through the peace programs found their way to the border region, through the EU INTERREG and cross-border programs money flowed into these regions as well. Because the border lands are at the periphery of the country, these areas are often deprived of strong economic activity. These programs helped to regenerate infrastructure that in turn promoted economic activity.

Not only economic activity was promoted, the peace and reconciliation processes were only possible because of the 'peace money'. This term 'peace money' was used by a couple different respondents to explain the European grants. Using these wording to describe the grants, it

reflects on the importance of the money for the peace process. One respondent even went so far that she said that *“without the EU we would be still in the Dark Ages.”* Another said that the EU funding is necessary for the order regions, for peace and economic regeneration.

Not all projects were as successful, the same respondent saying that without the EU, the region would still be in the Dark Ages, also said that some projects were a waste of money. The local communities often couldn't continue funding these activities, so when some of these programs ran out of budget, the projects died out. Some of the projects were massive community center buildings. In Pettigo, an extremely impoverished town that is divided by a small river which happens to be the border as well, the EU funded a multi-million euro costing community center. A modern massive center is built right in between houses that are almost collapsing, the respondent even told me that a couple days prior on of the houses across the street of the community center actually collapsed. This center functions as a place where communities can organize events, local schools can use the gymnastics and is supposed to be a conference center for the two counties on both sides of Pettigo (Special EU programmes body, 2013). I interviewed a woman working inside the place, and she was very positive about the role the center played in the peace process.

A local community worker explained how Pettigo is in serious decline and blames the border: *“The people around here never wanted a border: it was imposed on them.* He further concludes that *Perhaps [...] someone should have realized that it was basic services, rather than heritage centers, that the people of Pettigo needed.* (The Irish times, 2001) It seems that this building, which is well intentioned does create friction on how more than 8 million euros have been spend on this area.



Figure 6: A community center on the left, a tent a bicycle in the center and ruins in the background; all in Pettigo (picture by the author).

It is safe to say that not all European projects in the border region have been a tremendous success and some actually failed, but generally speaking they have been crucial in the process and helped to shape the peaceful region that it is now. In Castlederg a man said it strikingly, *“A lot of work has been done behind the scenes, bridging the communities. Not a lot of people know about it, but it has been extremely helpful to these areas.”*

7.6 Sense of place

As people were sharing their histories with me, it seemed that through comparative geographies of shared memories storied were told. Respondents evoked images of well-known geographical concepts to exemplify their stories to me as an outsider. So told the pub owner in Rosslea that these areas were known as the *“Wild West of the North”*. The purpose of such a comparison is to spark an imagination of the stereotypical ‘Wild West’, as this concept of ‘Wild West’ is commonly known. Through reproduction in Western media and culture, there is a shared connotation of the Wild West. It resembles the Western frontier in the America’s during the 18th and 19th century, which is according to the dominant reproduction an area full of lawlessness, violence and other forms of misbehavior. Whether it’s a true historic resemblance of the Western American frontier or not, what matter is that the respondent evoked such a stereotypical image

to exemplify life in Rosslea during the troubles. Through such a comparison understanding life in the Troubles becomes easier. Apparently, Rosslea did see a lot of violence and lawlessness during the Troubles, and this is how the pub owner experienced and more importantly felt the place. The comparison with imagination of Wild West helps therefore greatly to understand past geographies and senses of place.

Not only Rosslea was known as the Wild West, the Northern Irish towns of Crossmaglan, Rosslea and other villages that form a sickle of a moon around the Irish county Monaghan were known as 'Bandit county' during the Troubles. In the same sentence the respondent exclaimed that the border region is where everyone gets killed. This powerful comparison to bandit country evokes the idea of a lawless, violent place as well. This was not only one respondent stating this comparison. There has been a book written on this area called 'bandit town'. Moreover, a vast majority of news articles refer to this area as bandit country. This term to describe the South Armagh region is embedded in the discourse and gives a clue of the imagination of geographies during the Troubles on this region.

7.7 Identities

"There is a massive divide in communities in Northern Ireland."

To understand the troubles and society in general in Northern Ireland, one must look into the identities formed in Northern Ireland. As discussed before, Northern Ireland can be divided between the Catholic community and the Protestant community. This divide came forward in every interview as a major dimension in the society. One respondent told me that *"you had to be in one side or the other"*. This reflects on the collective identity forming. Another man in Castlederg said, *"you were born and bred with it"* and with it he meant the religious divide.

Bourdieu's habitus

Bourdieu's idea of habitus is very helpful in analyzing these processes. A habitus can be explained through a social group that shares the same 'common sense', the *lex insita* (Bourdieu, 1977). In theory it means that agents, social actors, cope with the future through shared strategies of the habitus, the social group. These strategies are formed by the history of the habitus. Going back to the Northern Irish case, there is a strong history of these different habitus' in the society. The differences between the Catholics and the Protestants go back to the 17th century with the plantation of English Protestants in Northern Ireland. Over the course of the centuries, these Protestants got the big estates and the good lands, as explained to me by a respondent. Furthermore, *'the Protestants had all the government jobs, for me as a Catholic applying for one... people called me crazy'*. So the history of the habitus of the Protestant community caused that they were effectively the group in power in Northern Ireland. There was a widespread religious discrimination. On top of that, the old lady in Warrenpoint said how her father was

excommunicated because he married one from a different religion. This is further exemplified by the woman in Pettigo, who said that marrying someone from the other religious group was worse than murder. These two examples highlight how strong the division between the two habitus' were in the society. For example, in history in school was teaching grievances against the English, according to a Catholic woman.

The peace processes have helped relieving the pressure on this massive divide. As a couple of my generation's people said that religion doesn't matter that much anymore. Different groups can get along very well now. That doesn't mean there is still a divide, the strong differences in habitus might be relieved, but if we look at the politics of Northern Ireland, there is still this divide to be seen. The Catholics would vote for their own party; Sinn Fein and the Protestants would vote for one of their parties, mainly the Democratic Unionist Party. Already through these names the division can be seen, as Sinn Fein is Gaelic, the old Irish language, favors a Nationalist approach from the Catholic community, with its main goal being a re-unification of Ireland. The DUP is a conservative right-wing party that represents the Protestant community and is much more focused on creating strong ties with Britain and maintaining these linkages. It is further exemplified how the seats from the Northern Irish counties are represented in the House of Commons in London. Here the Sinn Fein members would, out of protest keep their seats empty against British rule. The DUP now will help the conservatives with a majority in return for over one billion pounds of support in Northern Ireland after the elections.

7.8 Border identities

Throughout the interviews it became clear that the border played an interesting role in the identity forming of communities around the border. It seems that people living along the border, both in the North and in the South see themselves different than in the bigger cities and towns. To start with explaining 'the border identity', one must look how smuggling played a role in society. As said before, smuggling was one of the main economic activities and the 'border people' would be actively doing this. It was part of life, especially before the troubles.

During the Troubles, the border people suffered a lot. According to Mulroe, there was a completely different dynamic in the border regions compared to the bigger towns. As cross-border mobility was severely hindered and the British security forces were very much present, life in the border towns was highly disrupted. Virtually every border town I visited, had been bombed either by the IRA or the UVF. The border people definitely were caught in between the cross fires. Not to suggest that the border towns were completely innocent; there were many local IRA fighters too.

Media wise, the border didn't get a lot of attention compared to the bigger cities. As one respondent explained; it was easier to fly into Belfast as a journalist, take a picture of the murals and be back home within 24 hours with a story. The border region was less tangible, harder to reach and people were less willing to talk about the troubles.

Also the geographic proximity to the border shaped the border identity. As the mayor of Castleblaney explained to me that because it was so close to the border, people in the South regarded it as part of the North. Therefore, they thought Castleblaney was dangerous to visit. Through this imaginative geography there was a division within the society of the 'border region' and the rest of the country. The imagination of geographies also extended to the identity forming; the reverend of the local Protestant community in Monaghan county (which is the Republic), said that because they were Protestants, they were regarded as Unionist being so close to the border.

It seems that in history, the border region formed a different category than the rest of the country because they are so close to the border and have a different interaction with the border and therefore create a different identity than the others.

Currently the communities around the border have bridged very well. As one respondent said to me that the conflict in the border is much more resolved than in the cities. In Crossmaglan, which was one of the most nationalist towns during the Troubles, the hotel owner told me that the Protestant and the Catholic community can get along very well. People in the border region wouldn't think in religious divides anymore, according to one respondent. Which is a huge contrast with the bigger towns in Northern Ireland, where still in these days there is the segregation of communities.

Economically speaking, the border region has its own dynamic and can even be named a border economy. It's not uncommon to have two kinds of currency in the wallet and do the groceries on both sides, wherever it's cheaper. Many of the business people I spoke to, all said that their clients are from both sides, as if there is no border. The border people also have to rely on each other more, because it's a largely agricultural society. One respondent explained this with the example of farmers on both sides of the border helping each other out with the harvest, with water supply and other farmers tips. Now it's not uncommon for farmers to have land on both sides of the border. Owning a group of fields where a stream in one field apparently is the border between the two political institutions. For these farmers it doesn't matter, the ground is the same on both sides of the stream, the rain doesn't fall on only one side of the border. Nature doesn't care about this man made division, neither does farmers, yet now they are confronted with it and have to deal with it somehow.

Yet it's hard for a town on the border, according to the man in Belleek. You're constantly adapting to differences in policies from the Northern Irish government or the Irish government. He said that their business was '*on the wrong side of the border*'. It is literally 20 meters in the North and therefore subject to all kinds of different rules and regulations than a gas station across the street, which would be in the South. Especially now with the Brexit, he feels forgotten, ignored, as if they don't matter.

When looking at the statistics of the Brexit, the border regions voted disproportionately remain. The average in Northern Ireland is about 54% for remain, while the border regions up to 70% voted for remain. It greatly symbolizes how the politics work in Northern Ireland. The DUP campaigned for leave, so the Protestant communities would vote for leave, and Sinn Fein would campaign for remain so all the Catholic communities voted for remain. Spatially, the regions with more Catholics voted for remain and vice versa. This spatialization goes back to the map previously used in this research, with the 1609 plantation act found on page 19. The border regions are the exception. Here even the Protestant communities have voted for remain, despite what the tradition is in Northern Irish politics. It reflects greatly on the fact that the border people form a different group of people. These people know how important an open border is, these people have come together instead of deepening the conflict. They feel forgotten by the governments in Northern Ireland and in Ireland. They are seen as being different than the rest of both societies. They form a distinct different category, economically, culturally and politically the border people are different.

7.9 Brexit

No matter which side they would live, gender, age, occupation or religion. No one wants a border again. The people in the border region don't want a Brexit. It was a shock for many when they learned the news. People couldn't believe it. As one said it politically correct: *"the border is a stupid idea."* Another respondent said it very strikingly *"The voters in Engeland clearly forgot the people in Northern Ireland."* Brexit was all about taking control back of the country, ridden with xenophobic lies, it build on populist promises feeding from insecurity caused by the global capitalist system. It clearly didn't take the precarious situation of the Irish border into account. The border regions didn't get a lot of attention during the debate. This exemplifies how this region falls outside the general political debate, it's the forgotten area. This feeling is also shared by many respondents;

"We are the forgotten ones, we don't matter."

The insecurity of what will happen to the border region is echoed by many. The owner of a coffee place in Garrison – a town in the North encircled by the border – said that the insecurity is killing, he wants to know what is going to happen. Same for the woman in Dundalk, who even said that she has the feeling that no one in the English government actually knows what is going to happen.

When asking what the worst case scenario would be; every respondent said a hard border, meaning some sort of control or customs. One respondent said that it's just impossible to control the border; something that the British found out during the Troubles and even 400 years ago during the plantation. Economically a border would be devastating, *"absolutely devastating"*, the entire economy in the border region is build on an open border, on costumers from both sides. A border that would limit the freedom of movement will therefore hurt the economically significantly. The fuel station owner said *"If the border comes back, I might as well close my business."* As many of my respondents were either business owners or worked along the border, the impact on their daily lifes by a hard border can't be underestimated. This region might fall back on the economic malaise it has seen during the Troubles. One old man said jokingly: *"Well if the border comes back, we would be smuggling again"*.

I also asked if the Troubles might be re-ignited by the Brexit, because it would divide the communties again. Most of the respondents answered negatively on this, *"communities have bridged too much"*, *"we are past that point"* *"I don't see the troubles coming back because of the Brexit"*, were some of the answers. Apparantly the Northern Irish society has moved forward from the Troubles. The divide is still tangible in the air, but there is no violent dimension to it.

However, the old truck driver in Belcoo said that dissidents of the IRA might blow up any customs that would be instated because of the Brexit. The Brexit would then legitimize the existence of these groups.

Long term trends.

On the short term the Troubles won't come back, but on the long term there are some ingredients for conflict on the long term. Northern Ireland is heavily subsidized by the British government, much of the economy in Northern Ireland runs on public services. Annually it costs the British 10 billion Pounds to support all the benefits and the economy. In the long run, it's to be expected that Brexit will damage the British economy, which will make the economic burden of Northern Ireland even heavier. This is not sustainable for the long run, potentially crashing the Northern Irish economy. On top of that, demographically speaking, the Catholic community is growing faster than the Protestant community. Although religion is becoming less of an issue in the society, identity politics is becoming more popular throughout democracies, including the Northern Irish one. As the Brexit vote was mainly decided in England, and the border regions had very little to say about their territory and 'their border', this could aggrivate communities on the long run. This combined with the economic disparity, demographic changes, might cause old grievances to surface which could lead to violence. Especially since these communities have a history of looking 'over the border for sense of identity'.

8. Cyclo-geography: the borderlands from the perspective of the Bicycle

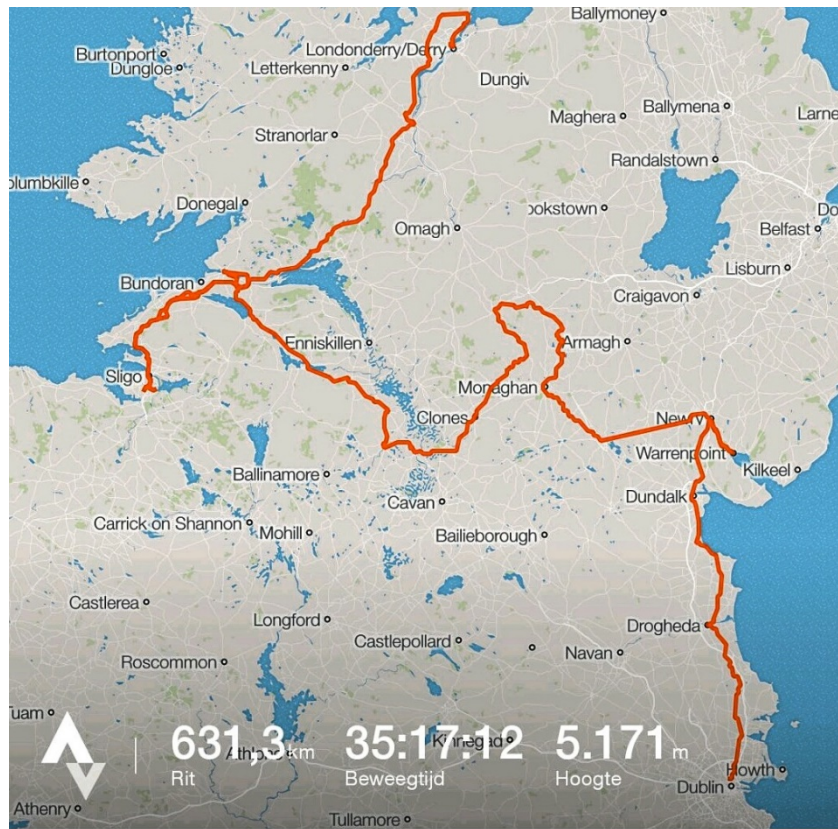


Figure 6: the total route cycled. Data tracked by Strava.

8.1 The first days and a market place.

I said goodbye to my travel companion with whom I stayed in Dublin and Annagasson and made my way to the first border town on the Irish side, Dundalk. A chilly sea breeze from the East accompanied me while I cycled along a busy road towards the town. It was clear that this town was the biggest town surrounded by smaller villages. It probably was the center for economic activity more or less halfway between Dublin and Belfast. I was greeted by a couple signs from the EU INTERREG project, developing nature, roads and general infrastructure. It was the first sign of big political entities influencing the production of space here. I followed the main way into town and found myself on a quaint market place, coffee places dotted around the recently renovated square. The sun was shining and people were enjoying their morning coffee and

newspaper outside. The chilly breeze from the sea made sure that everyone was wearing a jacket, it's a place at the coast after all. This bay was one of the first places where Vikings landed on the Irish isle, rampaging through the largely agricultural society. From Annagasson to Dundalk, I followed the curve of the bay, which was a windy yet calm bay. It seemed logical that it was a corridor, a passing point, a site of interaction from outside the island. Scottish conquests, Ulaid (Belfast region), Norman, French even Dutch forces fought for this town. It seems fitting to start the journey in this place. Many foreigners started their conquest of Ireland from this place. I'm fortunately not here to conquer the lands, but to understand the lands, immerse myself in the lands. My bicycle will be the instrument through which I experience these lands, these hills, these roads. I'll do my own conquering. Some say knowledge is power, hopefully I can gain power coming weeks. Not through violence, but through communication, humbleness, genuine connection with inhabitants of these lands. People who have shaped the history of these lands, helped to alter the lands, helped to write the history books through their actions. I'm not here to become an expert on the border, I'm here to share their knowledge and mold it into a thesis an article, an idea.

Agora of conflict.

I order a coffee on the market place, in the late stretches of the morning. I look around me, observing the place. I see people walking with their dogs, teenagers hanging on benches, there is even a fountain giving some life to the place. The place breathes peace, a place where parents with their buggies chat with friends. There is an art project on the square, I take a look at a row of glass slabs with text on them. As it turns out it's a legend about "the Tain". A Queen fighting off invaders over an argument including a bull. Apparently, this place was a corridor between the hills, where invaders from the North of the island travelled south. It seems that these grounds were not only conflict of foreigners, but also 'north' against 'south'. It seems that on the market place where everyone comes together, a tale of conflict must be remembered. I walk towards a shop adjacent to the square, where I meet my first respondent. We chat a bit about the weather before explaining my purpose. Apparently this town was known as 'El Paso' during the troubles, because it was such a dangerous town full of IRA fighters. She herself knew a couple too, everyone knew people here that fought in the IRA. She had family in the North, reflecting on that fact that here around the border the communities aren't so divided. They form over the border, they grow through the cracks of the border. It was very difficult for her to visit her family in the North during the peak of the troubles, but now with the peace agreements it is like the border doesn't exist anymore. As we are talking people enter her shop. They buy some note books and leave the story. Apparently these were from the North, she could judge by the accent. There is a lot of going back and forth now with the open border. Economic activity, marriages, commuting, it all happens between the Northern Irish town Newry and Dundalk. The new highway between Belfast and Dublin helps the flow of people even more, Dundalk is just one exit of this road.



Figure 7: The agora of conflict; now peaceful and full of coffee places (picture by the author)

As I thank her for the talk, I walk back to the square where my bicycle was parked. In 1975 a bomb exploded on this square. On a busy Friday night a couple days before the Christian holiday of the year, the streets packed with people, a car filled with explosives was detonated. Miraculously only 2 persons die and 15 are injured. The square was one massive mess.

The square is a perfect place to make sense of the journey coming ahead. In the present times it is a peaceful place, people are from both sides, mixing as there is no difference. Yet the Troubles are still memorized and shaped the place. A plaque now reminds the people of the ravage that brought the conflict here and through an art installation the place also memorizes past conflicts between the North and the South. How the Brexit will alter the place, no one knows yet. It is very evident that the very reason that this square is alive is through the open border, through the freedom of mobility, because of the European Union investing in infrastructure, which is widely used by people. Cars have Irish and UK number plates, parked next to each other as there is no difference.

Bicycle smuggling.

The local shop owner shared stories how her parents used to smuggle at the border. Butter and flour was cheaper in the North. Most of this smuggling was done by the bicycle, as it was a cheap and efficient means of transport. As I exited Dundalk I searched for the back roads to cross the border. I wanted to retrace the route that her parents made more than 50 years ago. The roads were quiet, much of the traffic used the main road as I cycled towards my first crossing of the border. I picture myself 50 years back, cycling in the dark, with no lights listening to the sounds of customs, bags filled with essential products.

The road was decorated with hedgerows, creating a tunnel towards the border. I checked my GPS, only a couple miles away from the border. I should cross it in less than 20 minutes. I know the border is open, that the United Kingdom and Ireland tried to break down every physical structure that represented the border or the customs. There was no sign waiting for me at the border saying 'Welcome in Northern Ireland' or anything similar. I climbed a small hill, and rounded a corner. Next to me was a railway track. It was the high speed rail connection the two capitals of the island; Belfast and Dublin. I checked my GPS again, to see if I would have crossed the border. A train races past me on its way to Belfast. Would these people know that they just crossed the border? Would they realize that while sitting on this very exact spot would be my first border crossing of many? That 60 years ago on these roads people smuggled to earn an economic living? That many of these roads were blown up to control the movement of people?

There is a slight change in the asphalt quality, a tiny black line of tar clueing that construction works once stopped here and others had to continue, connecting the roads. I roll downwards. I get greeted by a sign stating miles per hour. It's the United Kingdom. I exited the European Union and entered the next political domain. It's my first taste of Northern Ireland, of crossing a border. It's my start of the border flaneuring. It is effortless. The same pedal stroke that would drive me forward on any piece of road in the world, drives me know over a dividing concept, a black line in the atlas, a dimension that shaped a conflict, shaped the lives of thousands and now presents a massive issue to politicians in Dublin, Belfast, London and all the capitals in Europe. It's nonexistent on this very spot on the ground, yet it manifests itself in the minds of millions.

Smuggling gave the locals power over their economic lives. The shop owner, maybe even with a hint of jealousy, told me that the border made people very, very rich. She said that many of these estates dotted around the border were paid with illegal activity. I cycle past many of them around this part of the border. Driveways of a couple hundred meters distance the houses from the road, meticulously well maintained gardens separate the public hedgerows from the private grounds. There is not much live happening on these streets, near the houses. An odd gardener maintains the grounds. Dogs bark more curiously than aggressively to me and the bicycle. Where are the inhabitants? Still smuggling butter? I chuckle at my own joke. It's highly unlikely that these rich people would even take the effort to load a car full of butter. There is no need. I myself am

smuggling enough stuff bought on one side to the other. I assume that they have flocked to management positions in anonymous offices in Dublin or Belfast, breaking their heads on what to do with the Brexit. Maybe, just maybe, they are thinking of smuggling again. Going back to the good old days, trace their parent's footsteps. Some of them are coming home already, big cars pass or overtake me while I slowly make my way to the next big border town. It's time to visit Newry in Northern Ireland.

Border communities.

Before I enter Newry I get greeted by a massive billboard stating "Border communities against Brexit, respect the remain vote". Next to it there is a billboard commemorating Mark McGuinness, a controversial Northern Irish politician who played a major role in the peace agreements and allegedly in the IRA. These signs are placed next to a miles per hour speed limit, which is a symbol of British rule and law. I find this a bit ironic, maybe done purposely, but it shows that the belongings here are visualized. It seems that these communities are very much in favor of an open border and a controversial Irish nationalist politician.

No later than 5 minutes into town, I find myself on a roundabout where there are similar billboards. This time littered with stickers of "get out England". It seems that the community living in Newry to a large extent is still 'anti-British' and anti-Brexit. From there, I roll into Newry where I take a right exit, leading the way to the South East. This direction will take me to the very start of the Irish border, the most South Eastern point of it. It's where the bay of Omeath and Warrenpoint end. Cycling on these roads spark memories from my time cycling in the United Kingdom in the Bristol area. The lay out, the road design, the way the infrastructure is maintained, signs, it all reminds me of British rules and regulations. It is logical as these roads are officially domain of United Kingdom, but it feels strange to cycle on them, so far away from England and so near Ireland.

A bridge too far.

It's a 20 kilometer detour to finally arrive in Warrenpoint. It's a cycle all around the bay which is only a stone's throw wide. There were ideas of a bridge being built between the two small towns on the starting point of the border, between Omeath, the Republic and Warrenpoint, the North and there was even European grants available to fund the costs. However, this bridge was never build. The minister of Finance apparently in Northern Ireland, blocked the project because he feared that it would bring 'the south to close the north'. He wanted to make a clear distinction between the two sides (Keenan, 2013). As a result for a me, velo-flaneuring, I have to cycle a detour to finally start at the beginning of the border.

In Warrenpoint I take a rest in a park called Queens park. It's official, I am in the United Kingdom. It would be impossible to name something after the Queen in Ireland, as the queen is the symbol

of the United Kingdom. The shop owner in Dundalk shared a story that she was watching the royal family wedding of Princess Diane at her partner's house when her father in law entered the room, and hit her while screaming 'why are you watching this filth on television?'. It's safe to say that the royal family weren't particularly liked in Ireland.

All this detouring because of political frictions and pride has made me hungry and I find a small bakery where I talk to the owner. She is just extremely afraid with what is going to happen economically in Northern Ireland. I struggle with the currency, she accepts Euro's, Pounds but with the certain Pound sterling that is created in Northern Ireland, doesn't buy goods in the rest of the United Kingdom. Puzzled, I leave the bakery and make my way to the water side, where I devour a loaf of bread, looking at the water towards the Republic of Ireland. If I would have had a stone, I could throw it on Ireland. So close yet so far. It's highly symbolic that here between the two sides there can't be a bridge build funded by the European Union because of political tensions in Belfast, causing the local population to suffer and preventing cross-border contact to be made.

I cycle around a bit more in town and see an old man working outside, painting a fence. I ask if he could fill up my water bottle before I'm heading back to Newry and to the rest of the border. He invites me inside where his wife is cooking potatoes. They are both well in the 70's and I start a conversation about the border, the Brexit and my bicycle. I get offered tea and biscuits while we talk about the Troubles. Before I leave, she says at least 5 times 'just be careful out there'. What does she mean with out there? Outside the border region? Outside town? Or just generally outside? I'd like to think that it's the former, that the border region is safe, because everyone watches over each other and outside the border region, you have to be careful.

I do some groceries in Newry and cycle out of town, in the direction of Crossmaglan. About 15 kilometers out of town, I take a left on a back road, take another right a bit later on an old road leading into the fields. Here I climb over a fence, take my stuff over the fence too and set up camp for the first night near a ruin which looks out over the hills and fields. It's close to the border. Maybe these ruins were used by the IRA to watch the area below. Maybe even these ruins were used as weapon caches. It's a perfect spot to watch the area around and even look up to a couple hills, where according to locals, the British had a massive barrack. Now this spaces is occupied by a bicycle a one person tent, some cooking appliances and myself, writing notes.

Dogs bark in the distance when they pick up my smell and I watch the sunset from my tent. I write my ideas of the day down in my diary and contemplate the eventful first day. It seems that Newry is definitely a massive Catholic town, when I exited the town, I was greeted by a memorial of former IRA fighters, but then the Socialist IRA fighters. The area was again territorialized with Irish flags, clearly stating that you'd be entering Catholic area now. It seems that this is practice, especially in the North, that flags delimitate territory. And these territories are definitely looking

to the south for a sense of belonging, South to the Republic. Over the border, away from the governments in London or Belfast.

8.2 Parks and flags.

Two days and 140 kilometers on the bicycle. There is no hurry to race through the border lands today, it would defeat the purpose if I would race. I pack up my stuff and make my way down the hill towards the roads leading to Crossmaglan. En route, I came across a couple Catholic churches. I stopped at one of them to look around and check my GPS when a car pulls over next to me, “need help?” I answer “No thanks I’m fine” and before I know it, we are chatting about my trip and the border region “Oh we are all Catholics up here, are you going to Crossmaglan? I’m sure you will find people there to talk”. And so it is, I decide to head to Crossmaglan for the day. Just before I enter Crossmaglan, I reach a big crossing point. Although being in Northern Ireland, it seems extremely Irish. There are Hurley fields – which is a traditional Irish ball game –, there is a large memorial commemorating IRA fighters – freedom fighters – and a couple Sinn Fein campaign posters. I cycle towards the memorial where the text says “*Our brethren are not criminals*”. The only clue that I’m in Northern Ireland is a royal mail car racing past me on the busy road. It’s clear that this region is way more connected to Ireland than to Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom.

Crossmaglan.

Upon entering Crossmaglan, there are even more Irish flags and another memorial for IRA fighters. The past is very much connected in the present through this glorification of former fighters. The small town breathes this history, it’s impossible to enter this town without being reminded of the “heroic past”. I enter the town center where I look for a place for some coffee and my eye lands on the hotel. Here I sit down to have my daily caffeine doses. I grab a book to read and look out over the square, there is a small antique market where people from all over the region are selling stuff. There are cars with registration from the UK and from Ireland, all mixed and parked next to each other.

While I sit there a man from the market walks up to me, he says “what a nice bicycle you have, are you travelling around?”, before I know it, I’m talking with him about my research, the border and Brexit. He laughs and says “we don’t recognize the border here”, he stops a man walking outside the hotel, “this young gentleman from Holland would like to talk about the Border and Brexit, do you have a minute to spare?”. Before I know it, I’m invited inside where I sit down with the hotel owner, who gives me a lot of valuable information of having a business at the border. The only reason I got to talk to him was because my bicycle attracted attention from the right man, the bicycle is definitely a conversation opener and extremely helpful for my research. What

if I came here with a car? Would I be noticed just like now? Would I have seen the small stickers on the side of the road? Would the busy crossing point of earlier today have caught the same attention as it did now? I highly doubt it. The bicycle helps me enlive the spaces, understand the places and get in touch with the communities.



Figure 8: "We don't recognize the border here". Sense of belongings are visually manifested in the region (picture by the author).

I leave Crossmaglan, a town which will be mentioned a lot coming weeks in relation to violence in the troubles, and head back to the border. I knew I was going back to the border because of the hilly terrain. On my left I see one of the bigger mountains, one of the highest places in Northern Ireland. During the troubles one of the biggest watchtowers would have been here, looking out on these very same roads I'm cycling. Probably even noting down my movement. It was the *panopticon* of the borderlands. Over 3000 troops were stationed on that mountain, in an area inhabited by 24.000 people. I feel in awe looking to that mountain, realizing what kind of effect it would have had on the people here. I can almost feel the tension in the air that would have been around here, constantly being reminded of the militarization of the border, helicopters flying in and out, roaring breaking the peaceful silence of the border lands.

Mayor and the parkrun.

I cycle towards Castleblaney, on to the next border crossing of the trip. Again, just before crossing the border I see another "border communities against Brexit" sign, next to more Hurley fields. I cross a small stream on a bridge, looking on my GPS I see that it's the border. Just in the South at

the bridge there are ruins of an old farm. I guess that it was abandoned during the Troubles, as the person couldn't cross this bridge towards the next bigger town of Crossmaglan, because it was an unauthorized crossing point, in other words, the bridge would have been blown up. For the inhabitants of this house, it would mean a 5 mile detour just to get to the other side of the bridge, severely hindering their mobility. Probably because of this, they left the house and searched for another place to live. Another tragic life impacted by the border.

I keep following the same road towards Castleblaney in the South and here again there are houses with Irish flags, it dawns on me that the two sides of the border here are actually quite similar. They both use the same flag, play the same games and are economically, culturally and even religiously intertwined. The border doesn't create a division between two communities, it pulls the regions around it together, both sides deal with the border and therefore deal with each other. It helps to bring the communities closer, like there is a border community. Through all these cultural and political manifestations it's becoming obvious that the border in this region helps to create an overarching sense of a border community.

In Castleblaney it's time to fuel this research with vegan food from the local supermarket. The person in front of me pays with pounds, while I thought, being in the Republic of Ireland, they only accept euro's. So I ask the cashier if this is normal. "it happens all the time, it's the border that does it, people shop wherever their currency is worth the most."

I look for a good place to have my lunch, I find the local park and to much of my surprise it has park Wi-Fi. I sit down against the fence and spread out my lunch in front of me; bread, hummus, vegetables, a bit of chocolate and some fruits. Cycling burns a lot of calories, cyclo-geography, using the mind as well, even more. If I would have received a grant for this research, almost all the money would have been invested in local grocery stores. While I finish the last piece of bread a man approaches me and he asks if the Wi-Fi is working. A bit surprised, I answer positively and we are chatting about the border, the Brexit and my bicycle. He says he knows the mayor and rings the man. Not even 10 minutes later a man in a suit walks up to me and he is the mayor of the town. He promises to come back tomorrow morning to share his personal story and the perspective as a mayor. I decide to sleep in the park too, I pitch my tent and use the Wi-Fi to digitally escape the border regions and call with my girlfriend.

The next morning, 8 o'clock sharp, the mayor is back and he takes me to a coffee place up in the hills overlooking the border area, where he shares his story. Afterwards, He takes me to a community park run, where he introduces me to a lot of people with interesting stories. I'm fully accepted in the border community here. I stayed here for a couple days, sleeping in the house of a local police man and wife and I chat to many different people who all have the border as a big dimension in their lives.

8.3 Border legend

I have a next interview planned in Monaghan town, an easy 40 kilometer ride through the hills of the borderlands. Fortunately for me the European Union funded a couple infrastructure projects here, including a newly constructed highway towards Monaghan. All the traffic takes this main way, leaving me alone with the quiet country roads. In these lands not much is going on, it's mostly fields of agriculture, cows one side, lambs on the other. The odd tractor passes me narrowly on the roads and I'm always greeted friendly. A couple farms flock together resembling something like a village, just as easy as I ride into them, I exit them without realizing I went through them. It seems that this road I'm now on, used to be the main road, I counted 3 closed pubs. These pubs were probably quenching the thirst of weary travelers with the iconic black export product of Ireland, now these signs are battered by the sun and wind and hang loose in their hinges. It's the smallest scale of how process leaves some regions behind. These bars are closed because of the new big main road, diverting all the traffic a few miles away. In a region that is already the periphery of two countries, on an island that is geographically on the outer edges of the Union. Sometimes geography is unfair for these bars.

Monaghan is the next proper town I'm visiting, it's bigger than the previous couple days. Here I'm meeting with Patrick Mulroe, who is a keen cyclist himself and wrote a book on the border. After the talk he feeds me with muffins on the go and directs me towards Mullan village. Here a border legend lives according to him. In a small town that is enclosed by the border, a man lives that was the sole inhabitant for over 25 years during the Troubles because the border closed of everything. He was born and bred in the same house. I found him sitting on his porch, looking out on the newly built family homes that are slowly being filled. He is living history. He told me that an investor bought the entire village for just 400,000 euro's, with all the buildings included. Because of the open border, families are now returning, the freedom of mobility gives them access to multiple towns for work and services.

Border river

When going out of Mullan Town, I cross a river towards the North. Because of the exceptionally great weather and hilly terrain, I'm sweaty. The borderlands influence me physically. I decide to take a swim in the border. To be precisely in the border. There is no better way to immerse myself in the border, than through swimming in it. This water will be much discussed as a judicial division coming years during the Brexit negotiations. This water won't be seen as water, It will manifest itself as a political entity, the influence of this water on the lives of the people reaches far beyond what traditionally water is. As Narcissus drowned himself while looking in the water in vanity, the United Kingdom looked at itself in the Brexit, hoping to become much more than it is, but also highly likely to drown in these waters of the border and the waters of the border between the European continent and the island. I myself try to reach the waters, it's a muddy bank. While I try to step towards to stream, I sprain my ankle in the mud. How ironic.

The border isn't something bath in, the border is there to cross, the border influences space but the border itself, right in the border, there is no space. It's like a space between words. It doesn't exist, it's just blank, but it influences both sides of 'it' and therefore the people who interact with it. It's the difference between for example *akin* and *a kin*. The space is nothing, yet it exists. By non-existing it affects the observer and both sides to it. Or in case of the border, it's physically nothing, yet it exists. It influences both sides and it influences the observer, or the crosser. The water where I realized this, is nothing but water. Still, this is the space between two geo-political power blocks. This water has been the reason for violent conflict for decades. It's the reason why Irish flags is so prominent in the Northern towns. This water will be a very delicate issue for politicians in Brussels and London. Yet here it's just water next to a limping cyclists. I accept my defeat from the border and go back to my bicycle to find my way to the next town.

The rest of the afternoon I dwell for 30 kilometers around the border, closing the half circle that the border makes around Monaghan. I retrace the river, but then 30 kilometers down the line. Once a peaceful stream, then chosen to divide the island on religious majorities, back again to a peaceful stream where the border takes another turn. I decide to camp near the stream, I cook my dinner with water from the border, and pitch my tent in the South while looking in the North. Birds chatter, a car passes in the distance and mosquitos do their evening dance in the setting sun. It's becoming a very intense trip, all the impressions, conversations, the cycling, a day is filled with experiences. Everyday I'm learning something new about this region, about its past, about the inhabitants, about the people who lived through history but will never be mentioned in the history books. Incrementally I'm developing a feeling, my own sense of place to these lands. It's filled with great people, always on the look-out for you. The scenery is spectacular, intense green fields, dotted with trees and livestock. The odd farm on the side of the road with farmers working in and around these settlements. The hills, the climbing of these hills and then treating you with a view on the lands, stretching out miles in every direction. Clear skies, blue skies, sometimes a puff of clouds. The heavy breathing when climbing a hill, the gusts of wind in my ears when racing down a hill. The hidden coffee places in small towns, the friendly, curious people asking what I'm doing, where my wanderlust will take me. The nights spend with strangers, inviting them to your houses or buying drinks, talking about their lives and politics. These lands never looked outwards towards capitals to form a community or a sense of belonging, they look inwards, across the border to the other periphery. Together they look inwards and find each other. Peaceful streams dividing power blocks, English voters far, far away deciding what happens to their lands, diplomats in Brussels and London, using their voices and lands as negotiation tools in some abstract political level. Here the stream is just a stream, some water. Live performs around the border, over the border. As it doesn't exist. Or at least, performances pretending it doesn't exist, yet conveniently using the existence of the border for economic advantages. Working in the South, living in the North, marrying in the South. Especially this way of negotiating with the border brought peace and prosperity, the open character, getting rid of the mental border,

promotion of mobility. It helped to “relax the society”, an open border meant that the clear division between the English and the Irish became vague, the unbridgeable yawn, slowly but surely bridging. As two continents by the force of plate tectonics inch together, the open border acted as a sort of plate tectonics, inching two communities together. From the interviews it became clear that the Troubles is a thing of the past. No-one would like to see violent conflict on the scale of the 70’s and 80’s. From the breakdown of the Berlin wall in 1989 to the breakdown of this wall in 1998, people came closer. Now without a physical ‘other side’, meaning no physical delamination between two sides, the mental wall can slowly collapse too. So far the mental wall has fallen this much that there is no urge for violence between the two sides, but there is still a border. A border that 20 years later still exists in the minds of people. But progress is slow and steady. Just like mine on the bicycle along the border. I leave the pondering near the stream behind me and start the day freshly washed – this time it worked, bathing in the water -, ready for more kilometers on the bicycle.



Figure 9: The water border (picture by author).

8.4 Another Bandit town.

The next morning I cycle into the North again and make my way down south, towards Clones. Here I cross back again in the South, where I cross the border effortlessly. Immediately I get greeted by a sign of the EU interreg and smooth tarmac. The contrast with Northern Ireland is striking when it comes to the road quality. Maybe barely noticeable with a powered vehicle, but with a bicycle the road is directly translated to my body. The quality of the road is determined by the economic situation of the country, especially in the periphery. If there is more money available, so if the economy goes well, these roads tend to be of better quality. It's always a good indication of the country's richness, the infrastructure. As many told me already on the road, the EU spent a lot of money in infrastructure projects in Monaghan, the Republic of Ireland. So here I am on one of these roads, the cycling becomes much easier thanks to the European Union. Not even 5 minutes in the Republic and I see another sign that commemorates former IRA fighters. A lot comes together on this morning ride; quiet agricultural roads, European funds and Troubles memorials. It symbolizes this region very well, these country lands on itself aren't special, they could be found everywhere in Ireland, but so much history and institutions are woven into these lands. It defines the lands, politics manifests itself in these lands. It alters the lands, through programs, subsidies or through conflict. Understanding these lands means understanding the effect of the European Union, of the Troubles.



Figure 10: Quiet country roads funded by the EU. (picture by author).

Now the Brexit will put a massive stamp on these lands. Coming two years will make clear what kind of stamp, but a worst case scenario for everyone here is “a border”. A border still exists in the atlas, but the practices of these communities and especially of the younger generations are made as if the border doesn’t exist. Only an economic dimension of the border through the different currencies becomes manifest, the border communities deal with this rather playfully through deliberate cross border consuming.

A physical border implemented by the Brexit will definitely help to rebuild the mental border in the minds of the Irish and the English. When it comes to the Catholic communities in Northern Ireland, there is again something dividing them with their sense of belonging. Their eyes and feelings will yet again have to climb over a wall, if the Brexit creates a border. Their eyes will have even more trouble pointing towards Belfast, their official government. The will to be on ‘the right side’, might rise again, maybe, just maybe even with violence.. It’s a long term forecast, but definitely tangible. Now the ‘border communities’ have launched petitions, protests signs along the roads. The future is yet unpredictable, but there is certainly an exit on the Irish and English

path that is violent. The negotiations, the politicians in Belfast, the European Union and mostly the English government are the ones who are taking the exit. It's in their hands.

Rosslea's story.

Mobility wise, for me as an outsider, the open border is splendid. Only through experiencing the asphalt qualities I get a clue in which side of the border I am, but in the bigger picture it doesn't make a difference, these lands are majestic for cycling, no matter in which country I am. Next to newly born lambs, I cycle towards Rosslea, a small town back again in Northern Ireland. Here I stop after lunch in the local pub. I squint my eyes, it's another dark pub decorated with Guinness. A big contrast with the bright sunny days. Together with the pub owner and the local 'frequently visitor', we talk while they share the history of the place and the town. Again the fear for a 'hard Brexit' comes along. The history of this town is plagued with violent Troubles; the British army had a massive barrack here, which was targeted quite frequently by IRA fighters, again it was known as a bandit town. Now Sinn Fein posters decorate the walls of the town, meaning that even now the Catholics are in a majority, voting for a party that favors a united Ireland, their sense of belonging projected over the border instead of inlands towards "Belfast". Despite the open border, the border still exists in the sense of belonging and identity creation in Northern Irish communities. It creates a ridge to look over in envy, to long for the other side, to wish to be in the South, in the Republic. Through all these Irish flags and Sinn Feinn party posters, it creates a sense of belonging to Ireland. Maybe because of the border, albeit open, the Northern Irish border communities want to stress their sense of belonging even more; being a minority in Northern Ireland automatically creates a stronger urge to visually display the identity.



Figure 11: The only visual clue of a border: A border sign, ridden with bullet holes (picture by the author).

Brexit would have devastating effects for this pub, where I was pondering and sharing these ideas of the visual identities, as much of the clientele of this pub and town lives and works in the South. After paying and looking how the cash system accepts both Pounds and Euro's, I cycle up the local hill, next to a woodworking factory which used to be the challenged British barracks. Now it's peaceful and buzzing with business, because of the peace and open border. It would be a shame if to see it closed again because of the Brexit.

Cleansing border

From my night's sleep in a field in the South, I cycle towards Belcoo, a town that is- like many border towns- split by a river which happen to be the border. The bridge itself used to be full of checkpoints, but now lorries race over them like any other bridge. Cars with registration from both the North and the South drive over them without any regard of crossing from the U.K. to Ireland or vice versa. Next to the bridge, I park my bicycle at a pub and spend the rest of the evening talking with the 'frequently visitors' with an insatiable thirst for Guinness. If I would have accept all the free beers, much of the conversation would be lost and the next morning cycling a lot more difficult... I sleep at the lake side, the lake is the border too. I haven't had a proper

shower in a couple days, so I take a swim in the border. The borderlands made me sweaty, cycling all these hills, now the border itself cleans me.



Figure 13: A site where many interviews were held: local pubs (picture by the author).

Merging and fragmenting

The sides of the roads in these lands are decorated with hedges, sometimes when on top of a hill the view stretches all the way around for miles. On top of such a hill I realize that the borderlands consists out of many borders. All these fields stretching as far as the eye can see, are all demarcated and fenced off with hedges, wires and water ways. The borderland is a mosaic of borders, of fields, of small little territories. It seems as if the borderlands was a piece of glass and got shattered, on the point of breaking. All the different cracks in the glass resemble the plots of land, and together, all these small borders make up the borderlands. The border is fragmented. The country roads swirl through these little territories, rarely in a straight line. Sometimes cycling feels like a river, weaving through the landscape in search of the easiest permeable route. Only the bigger roads and the highways are the long straight roads, with little regard for the landscape. My preferred quiet country roads help me to read the landscape better than any other road.

Not long after that I'm forced to take the bigger road. It's a road that crosses the border at least 3 times in 2 miles, heading towards Clones. Locals told me that during the Troubles, no one used to road anymore because of all the checkpoints. Clones, a fairly sized town, therefore suffered a lot, it stopped the natural flow of people. Many businesses had to close down and the town became deprived. The same locals also said that Clones never fully recovered as visitors were now used to go to other places. Clones did receive some massive EU funding for peace projects, if it has been successful, I don't know. The towns seems less deprived than the stories told me, but still there are empty shops, bad infrastructure. But there are a lot of tourist signs of a city walk along all the beautiful spots and buildings. It seems that they are actively trying to make Clones the regional capital again as it used to be. Now this road crossing the border multiple times is a very busy road full of lorries. In fact it's one of the more dangerous roads I have cycled on, it's narrow and lorries race past me. Maybe uncomfortable for me, but all these lorries are a sign of economic activity, of trans-border economic connection. If there wasn't much economic activity, not so many lorries would have been needed here. It's symbolic how the open border has helped the economy grow through the mobility. This road, these spaces were deprived with a closed border during the troubles, but now with an open border it's a huge difference and has helped the local communities grow economically.

8.5 The Aleph

The next morning cycle out of Belcoo, already halfway into my journey. There are two ways to get to the nearest town. The normal one and the scenic one. Of course I take the scenic one and it leads me straight into the hills. The road is just straight. As if the engineer took a map, a pencil and a ruler and decided that the road should follow the line as he drew a straight line on the map. The road takes no regard for hills whatsoever. A landscape geographer once called these hills the necklace of Ireland draping the island from East to West. Much of the border follows these hills, already well known in my legs.

As I am going up and down, up and down for the entire morning on this road that couldn't care less about politics, I reach 'the Aleph'. I am officially in Northern Ireland now, cycling towards Belleek. But if I look to my left over the lake, I can look over Ireland. Suddenly the concept of nations, of European Union of the United Kingdom alienates from me. How is it possible that this space is so different than the space I can see? I'm both in the North and in the South, but also in neither of them. In these spaces it doesn't matter, these spaces have their own rhythm. After being in these lands for over a week, I finally experience it myself.

The space I am looking at is geographically situated in the Northern half of Ireland, in the hills. It's assigned as a border, but there is no visible border. No walls, no fences, nothing. Understanding this space requires the Thirdspace, the Aleph. Here everything comes together; *"subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency,*

mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history” (Soja, 1996). The border region, the borderlanders, all of them, all of it dwells in the Thirdspace. The subjectivity of the “right or wrong side”, the objectivity of the hard currency differences, the imagination of geographies on ‘the bandit region’, the unimaginability of the Brexit a couple years back, the construction of the social world and identities. Everything happens in the Thirdspace. These hills are the Aleph, where everything comes together, where everything is. This space is where all other spaces happen. Borges called the Aleph the space that contains all other points . Soja continued this idea on the streets of Los Angeles. Now I’m sitting in the grass at the side of the road, looking down on the hills but seeing everything and nothing. The alien concepts of nations intertwined on these hills, the sense of belonging over the hills yet nothing. On a few flags and stickers, all the ideas and talks happened in the Thirdspace. Everything is here, my entire project, my bicycle and my understanding of the region. These hills are just hills, but the space of these hills is ridden with politics, with society, with strongly rooted identities. (Borges, 1949)



Figure 14: The site of the Aleph, looking over the lakes and the mountains (picture by the author).

It’s echoed by many of the people living in and around here. “Belfast” or “Dublin” is just a distant name for a political entity, that has forgotten them. Here at the periphery they look not outwards

to the center of the land but they look inwards and when they look inwards they see the border. London feels like an even more distant concept to them. May? It's a month, not their leader. This here is their own land, hardly to be understood let alone captured in terms of nations or geopolitical power blocks. You'd work in the North, live in the South, marry a woman in the North, do the groceries in the South. Pubs here have cash software for both Euro and Pound Sterling.

During the Troubles there was the war in the cities, and the war on the border. Irish Guardia from the country and British soldiers would be stationed here. In an area that suddenly becomes a militarized zone, a space of conflict. Families are split. This border was once created almost 100 years ago to separate 6 counties that the British were still comfortable enough to control, then the British were fighting with their elite forces from the military to control these lands. Fear of British withdraw or victory for the IRA looms overhead for a couple years in the 70's. Fears of even more violence when that would happen prevents the total withdrawal of the British troops. For the border, the situation becomes dire, daily life grinds to a halt, mobility is hindered, the assassinations are becoming more frequent. These lands I look from on top of this hill were one of the most militarized zones of Europe, now it's peaceful, there is no visual border but the border left its marks on these people here.

The necklace of Ireland.



Figure 15: A part of the "Necklace of Ireland" (picture by author).

The same hills that stopped Protestantism spreading too far have now become a political entity themselves. I have been cycling these hills constantly, on both sides of the vague concepts of nations. I see lambs, calves, freshly out the womb on these hills. They form the life cycle of this largely agrarian society. Little lambs, eating grass of the Queen's majesty property after all. If they would have good eye sight, they could see just like me the Republic of Ireland just across this valley. Do they care? No. The border landers here also would rather not care. As distant and vague the concepts of nations and allegiances sound here, their lives are altered by it. The totalization of governments power has stretched in the daily lives here through bureaucracy and economy. But it hasn't conquered them mentally. Here the border landers form their own kind.

I cycle up and down, up and down even more. I have become the borderland. These hills are the border and this long straight road is the medium through which I can experience the border. The bicycle is the extension of my body, intertwining me with the borderlands. I don't care anymore if I'm in the UK or Ireland. I am cycling the borderlands on these hills. At night when I go to sleep,

my air mattress slowly leaks out all the air, leaving me in the middle of the night literally sunken in the borderlands. It doesn't matter anymore where I cycle, on these country roads people look out after each other, I get greeted the same, despite their accent, nationality and religion.

As I'm typing this on the side of the road, farmers drive past me, they come and go. But always stop to have a small chat, where I'm going, what I do, and how great the weather is. They know the landscape better than anyone else. So when they see me with my bike they analyze me. Is this boy fit enough the ride these lands? Will he make it up and down up and down up and down? They always warn me, be careful out there! If never know what 'there' is. Cities? Neighborhoods? Or even countries? Or is it another un-spatial name for anything outside the borderlands. I feel that it's the latter. Border landers, they know each other, they know the land. They understand the land. Everything happening outside, you ought to be careful for that, "be careful out there, out the borderlands".

The borderlands were never made to fall under a category of country, Union or kingdom. These hills, these valleys don't allow themselves to be trapped. They form their own rhythm, their own political entity. The British found out that these lands are impossible to control, in 1609, in 1960-70-80 and now also after 2019. Countries are hard learners. Whatever stamp the Brexit will have on these lands, the border landers will find a way to deal with them, one way or another. Their lives will be formed again by distant political powers, as always. Old tensions might arise, but they will just live through it, as they always have done. Future is grim, but the border landers are tough. They will find a way to continue living through the cracks of the border, through the weaknesses of political entities, in the informal spaces. No border can divide these communities, as the border is encapsulated by the community; as always, as the last 20 years with an open border, as in the future. Maybe the North side of the border longs more to the South side, but nevertheless they form one community, both intertwined with the border. The border community.

This border, almost 100 years old, was never a natural border, or a process of history. It was quick, it was strategic, it was in context of a crumbling imperium. Maybe the Brexit will be the beginning word of the final chapter of the border. I can see it happening, many people living here would see it too. A unnatural construct, finally taken out of these lands. 20 years now, the people had a taste of what life could be without a border and it improved life dramatically. Brexit will spark this conversation again, instead of having a hard border, let Ireland have Northern Ireland. The European Union would accept without the long bureaucratic processes, as written in the negotiation papers. Trade, culture, economics can continue to flourish like it did the last 20 years. The border landers, on both sides, would be relieved of their constant negotiation with the border.

The United Kingdom doesn't want Northern Ireland anyway, it's costing too much money to sustain it and it has cost even more in blood. Over the years it has become a pride issue, that may last another generation. Forcefully as it was created, maybe peacefully it will be taken away. Someday. Brexit is definitely a word in the final chapter of the history books of this border. It can consolidate, it can be demolished. The border landers hope the latter. The ever growing Catholic community in Northern Ireland too. The economy only grows with the open border. The answer on this question lays again in the hands of the distant powers in London. The key of the future is in hands of a parliament hundred miles away, as it always have been. Now more than ever with the radical Protestant party – the DUP – being the fundament of the newly formed Conservative government. We will see how it ends. There is hope, there is fear. These are the borderlands. This is their story in the wake of the Brexit.

After this intense moment of realization, I continue my way along the border. The days are filled with even more interesting talks, meetings and tragic cases of border towns. Many of the ideas described above find their way into my ears again through the mouth of strangers. Northern Ireland definitely suffers more from the border, as these border communities feel trapped 'on the wrong side', as said by a man in Belleek. Nights are spend in backyards of strangers, or in bed and Breakfasts paid by people whom I met just 15 minutes earlier, or even on couches of strangers. Days are spend with cycling, with sweating, with talking, with thinking. With en-living the borderlands.

8.6 “ ~ ”

The cycling journey ends in Londonderry~Derry, as the official name goes. Catholics call it Derry and Protestant call it Londonderry. It's the city where the troubles began. The border makes an unnatural curve around the city, giving the English a strategic harbor. Understanding the dynamics in this big city requires another research, as 'velo-flaneuring' is much more difficult in a dense town. Here classic Baudelaire's flaneuring would do the city justice. I myself try it one day, wandering aimlessly through town. Political activist stickers decorate virtually every lamp post in down town and a slight drizzle sets a gloomy atmosphere. As my cycling shoes make a clicking noise on the streets, I feel a bit out of place. The border lands are largely rural, everything is more spread out, it's a slower pace. Here I'm surrounded by buses, taxis, nightlife, it's buzzing. I struggle with the fast pace of it all. I have this more often when I have made a big cycling trip. I have to adapt to the city jungle. In Londonderry~Derry, it's hard to adapt after three weeks of intense research.



Figure 16: How identities are captured in place names: Derry/Londonderry (picture by the author).

The peace bridge that is built in the town is largely funded by the European Union, the “~” in the place name refers to it, to bridge the ‘Londonderry community’ with the ‘Derry’ community. In the end of the afternoon I travel from Londonderry~Derry towards the most Northern tip of the border I can reach by bicycle. It’s a tiny bridge over a small stream and as always, this stream is the border. The stream ends a couple hundred meters later in the sea, so this is as far as I can get. On the bridge there are two massive concrete slabs placed. It’s literally the first physical feature of a classic border, a wall or a fence I have come across cycling the border. I realize it’s a perfect place to capture a photograph of the border, having my bicycle parked between the two concrete blocks. While I’m taking a picture and recording a video, a man approaches me. I explained my purpose and said that I finally reached the end of the line. He laughs and says that these blocks are placed there because the bridge is crumbling and it can’t carry cars anymore, it has nothing to do with the North or the South.



Figure 17: National cycle network in Northern Ireland, with the peace bridge on the background, in Derry~Londonderry (picture by author).

As my journey started with a bridge that couldn't be built between two towns near Warrenpoint, my journey ends with a 'border bridge' that is crumbling. It seems like I have travelled the history of the border too; from an unbridgeable yawning gulf towards a crumbling border, temporarily maintained with concrete slabs, but eventually will fall apart. From customs, war, conflict towards an open crumbling border. I smile. I have lived the borderlands.

9. Conclusion.

The day is unusually bright for an Irish day in May. The sun decorates the green fields in a golden layer, the sheep and lambs are out. I see many new born animals grazing in the borderlands. The road I am following curls and corners around many of these pastoral fields. It is to be exact the road towards Clogher to Rosslea. The road is decorated with hedges on both sides, sometimes when the hedges are smaller or there is an opening, I can see through and look out on these fields. The fields here are all demarcated with these hedgerows, probably deciding on the actual shape decades ago. On top of these hills, farm houses stand. As a pearl, towering above the rest of the lands, looking out over the fields. When I find myself on top of one of these smaller hills, I look around. I can clearly see the fields, all neatly fenced off. According to my GPS, the border is supposed to be somewhere, but it is invisible to the naked eye. Then I see it; the borderlands are in fact a mosaic of borders. The border consists out of many smaller borders and boundaries, each and everything forming the borderlands. It looks like broken glass, all these odd sized shaped forms, together forming the borderland. I understand it better now, these fields on the border are symbolic. The border cannot be found as a line, but as a series of practices, as smaller miniature borders, creating the border and thereby the borderlands; actions, ideas, performances, sense of belongings, mobilities, small fields (quite literally if using Bourdieu's terminology). Throughout my journey I met many people in the borderlands, constructing through their stories a border. Myself, completely immersed in the borderlands, experiencing the entire border from start to finish, got to know the border too, through my outsiders perspective. As Beaudelaire was a flaneur, I consider myself a *velo-flaneur du frontier*.

9.1 Answering the research questions.



Figure 18: Concluding the research in one picture... (picture by the author).

How has the Irish border influenced the creation of identities in the border region and how will Brexit alter these identities in the light of the peace processes?

From the creation of the border until the writing of these words and especially in a “Brexit-future”, there has been a community in Northern Ireland that has felt being on the wrong side of the border. The foundation of Northern Ireland itself didn’t happen naturally, it was a process of a diminishing imperial power. The English gave home rule over the Irish island, but a large Protestant majority in the North wanted to stay English, causing the partition. The border was created along county lines that were predominantly Protestant, creating an ethno-religious divide on the island, yet with minorities on both sides of the border. The aforementioned community in Northern Ireland that is predominantly Catholic in religion and therefore much more linked towards the Republic of Ireland than to the United Kingdom or Northern Ireland. The typology of border dwellers by Wilson and Donnan is very applicable to this group. This community fits neatly

in the type of *‘those whose ethnic ties extend across the border and distinguish themselves from the other members of their state’*. Through flags, memorials, paintings, memorials and other visual attributes this community very much visualize their sense of belonging across the border to the Republic. Their territory in Northern Ireland is demarcated with flags. Spatially, these communities are centered along the border region with small Catholic ‘pockets’ in the capitals of Belfast and Derry~Londonderry. This research has particularly focused on the border communities, which in the North co-aligns with the majority of Catholic and therefore Irish communities. Spatially these regions also voted well above the National and Northern Irish average for remain during the Brexit vote. This is partly to be explained by their ethnic ties to the Republic of Ireland, but also by the very close proximity of the border. These people know how an open border is beneficial for their lives. Most of the inhabitants of these region remember the times when there was still a border, and how a closed border altered the space, mobility and life in these communities.

There is a case to be made about the difference in the communities centered around the border and into the mainland of the both respective sides. As came forward through the interviews, the borderlanders form a different category than the rest. These lands are more connected with each other and on both sides of the border than with the rest of the lands. This process of the creation of a border community is inherent of a border, but became very visible in the Irish case during the Troubles, where the border created an entire different dynamic. Some respondents even went so far to say that there were two different Troubles. The city version and the border version.

The conclusion would fall short if the border is only explained through the physical ‘open’ and ‘closed’ nature of it in relation to the identities, peace processes and Brexit. It’s of relevance to note how a post-modern approach helps to understand the border. As understood while cycling, the border for the recent times, albeit open, is still manifested through practices in daily lives and sense of belongings. Economically speaking, the border creates for the border communities a way of favorable consumption. Depending on the exchange rates, people shop on one side or the other. The border manifests itself in the consumption, in the buying of goods in a certain shop with a certain currency, either in the North or the South. Furthermore, businesses feel in relation to the Brexit as quoted ‘on the wrong side of the border’. Here the border manifests itself again in an economic dimension, but also through a sense of place. The respondents felt on the wrong side of the border – the Northern Irish side – because they feel that the Brexit will have a negative impact on their businesses. Culturally speaking the ties around the border are very close. Especially in the North, where the border community focused towards Ireland is a minority, their sense of belonging is visualized. A sense of belonging across the border.

How has the border shaped the lives in recent history?

From the consolidation of the border in the beginning of the 20th century until current times, the border and especially life in the borderlands changed dramatically. The older generations interviewed reflected on life at the border from post-Second World War, starting around 1950. The border physically was constructed through customs, checking people carrying goods from one political entity to the other. Northern Ireland in some ways could 'lift' with the United Kingdom's prosperity while the Republic struggled to create economic growth. Because of the religious differences and animosity towards each other, not much economic connectivity was established. However, the border region had a different socio-economic dynamic that came forward from the literature on the entire island. Goods from the North were smuggled towards the South, which was a very profitable business. Many families would use the border in order to take agency in their economic situation, from the interviews it came forward that some got extremely rich through these illegal activities. As the borderlands are spatially on the edges of political entities, it is logical that these activities happen here. Richard Sennett uses the example of the Avignon Town Wall as a place, a border, where classified as illegal trade is made because of the informality of the spaces, as an edge of the political sphere. A place where people can claim agency over their socio-economic situation. Outside the formal structures, outside of control. As many borderlands see this phenomenon, the Irish border was no exception.

The border manifested itself as well in the stark differences in the identity forming of Northern Ireland and Ireland. The unwillingness to economically cooperate did not happen in a void, it was a sign of the animosity between the two governments. The Catholic minority in Northern Ireland, which was spatially distributed along the border, were affected more by this process. It helped to create a fertile ground for the IRA and further exacerbated the de-legitimate perspective on the Northern Irish government by the Catholic community.

The dynamic of the border during the Troubles altered the lived spaces on the border, the nation state's perception on the border and the identity forming around the border. Firstly, daily life was massively hindered through checkpoints and closed border sections. Causing many villages and even towns to grind to a halt and sometimes even deserted. Historically both sides were culturally intertwined and the hard border hindered these connections. The border space became a visual manifestation of the political power from the English nation state, with elite military troops patrolling the border villages. It became a site of questioning of the political legitimacy, on both sides of the border. The perception from the English side on the Irish state was that it did not help enough in the struggle, providing a safe space for IRA paramilitaries on the south side of the border. Here the English forces couldn't effectively fight because it is sovereign space and an attack would be seen as an incursion. The truth however was that there was a lot of informal contact between both states in relation of the border and cross border violence. Nevertheless the appearance of British soldiers in these contested spaces aggravated

the Catholic community in Northern Ireland around the border, deepening the conflict, the sectarian violence and the urge for the end of British rule.

Many border towns, on both side of the border were perceived as dangerous. Towns in the Republic of Ireland, were because of the proximity to the border dragged in the Troubles. Towns were named after infamous violent cities, a processes of imagination geographies bringing distant border towns and perceptions to the Irish case. Towns lost their natural flow of visitors and became very impoverished. Especially on the south side of the border this was the result of perceived dangerous because of the spatial proximity to the border.

Protestants on the South side of the border were linked to the Unionists side because of their religion, despite their Irish nationality. This projected identity worked in various ways. If one is Catholic the person was automatically assumed to be on the Nationalists side and vice versa, if one is a Protestant the person is viewed to be on the Unionist side. Protestant communities around the border were therefore collectively categorized as Unionists. This religious-ethno divide were so strong before the Troubles started that marrying a person from the other believe was worse than murder and resulted in swift excommunication of the community.

The peace processes.

Echoed by many respondents, the peace projects partly funded by the European Union were extremely helpful in bridging the communities. It relieved the 'us versus them' feeling in both the Catholic and the Protestant community. 'Peace money' helped to fund 'peace trips' where people from both sides could meet and hear their stories. Furthermore, the EU funded community centers along border towns and infrastructural projects to enhance cultural and economic intertwinement. When talking about life currently, most respondents said that the division was still tangible in the air, but there are no violence or excommunication practices. Especially around the border areas, communities have bridged much more than the bigger cities, according to the respondents. It seems that the border region has currently a different social dynamic as well than the bigger towns in terms of reconciliation. This can be partly explained by the large catholic community inhabiting the border but also that because the border region is more focused inwards to each other than outwards towards political capitals. Communities rely on each other more and it seems through the site visit and the talks with people that the social cohesion – it's also a largely agricultural region – is stronger than in the bigger cities in Northern Ireland. Because communities experience a bigger social cohesion, the two 'sides' mix more, creating again less of an 'us versus them' feeling.

A highly symbolic example is that the Catholic church in the border town Castleblaney will be closed for renovation for a couple years. The services from the Catholic church will now be held in the Protestant church, after the Protestant service. The church here as a symbol for the religious-ethno identities now forms a bridge for both religious sides.

The community centers funded by the European Union created a strange special dynamic in the border towns. Especially the Thermon project in Pettigo was peculiar. The building is a multimillion state of the art community center, surrounded by houses falling apart. It gives a sense of a *cathedral in the desert*. Not all projects were successful in their goals. But when looking at the current situation, it can be concluded that the society is not as violent or divided as it was and this is partly due to the peace processes.

Open border in daily lives.

For many in terms of mobility it is as the border doesn't exist. The plenty shops I visited were all based on clientele from the North and the South. There is no difference dwelling in North or South of the border for the inhabitants. Culturally the borderlands have become even more intertwined through marriages and job opportunities happening across the border. Community events near the border draw people from both sides to it. Some respondents even went so far saying that it feels like there is no border. This is a result of the open border policy, the infrastructural funds and spatially getting rid of any signs of border crossings. One border crossing sign was visible during the entire journey. A sign saying "Welcome in Northern Ireland", which was ridden with bullet holes. Taking away buildings and signs that visualized the border, helped to take away the physical border. But that doesn't mean there is still a border.

Brexit and the peace processes.

The open border still creates a dimension that alters the life of the borderlanders, especially in the wake of Brexit. From the interviews on the South side of the border it came forward that these towns and communities feel pulled over the border into the Brexit. The Brexit will influence these towns in the Republic as much as the towns on the other side of the border in terms of economic viability, mobility and political tension. The border becomes a void, dragging the society near it towards it, without consent. As explained by the mayor in a Southern border town, the border in relation to Brexit is consuming all the energy for local electives. Many programs, cross-border initiatives, economic prosperity and basic spatial planning will be influenced by the Brexit and no one knows how exactly. Northern towns feel, as described by many respondents, on the wrong side of the border. Implying that the historic sense of belonging 'over the border' will be even more exacerbated by the Brexit.

On the short term, this will not have violent consequences but on the medium to long term there are a couple very important factors that must be monitored to keep this region at peace. Firstly the demographics are in favor of the Catholic community, that means in decades to come, it's to be expected that more communities have a sense of belonging across the border. These feelings must be acknowledged and dealt with by the English and Northern Irish government, an open border policy is a good way to start. Economically speaking, it's to be expected that the UK will suffer from the Brexit. Much of the economy of Northern Ireland runs on public services, which

could become too expensive for the UK to bear. For the border region, which will become again the periphery of the country instead of the current melting pot between the EU and the UK, this becomes even more urgent.

The power of the borderlands doesn't lay in the hands of the inhabitants. Its course is to be decided by distant political powers or with the Brexit by English voters. The borderlanders barely have political agency over their lives, which results in the inward look towards the border and across the border to the people sharing the same fate. "*We are the forgotten ones, we don't matter*" is probably the strongest quote supporting this feeling.

As Gielis and Van Houtum have argued that border dwellers can challenge the traditional discourse of the nation state, the case of the borderlanders in Northern Ireland definitely fit this argument. With a cross-border sense of belonging, a religious connection with the neighboring country and with a feeling of being 'trapped on the wrong side of the border' deeply rooted in the entire history of the community, the nation state of the United Kingdom is frequently challenged.

Future of the border.

When it comes to feelings about Brexit besides the aforementioned one, there is a strong fear for the unknown. Many businesses want to know what is going to happen with the border and with the Brexit and how it will change their businesses personally. Continuing that same train of thought, there is a widespread feeling that the British government doesn't know it themselves too. A worst case scenario for every respondent and everyone I talked to is a hard border. A hard border would mean an end to all the peace efforts, to the connectivity and to the lives as people know it today. It's viewed as a mayor step back, there were some who feared it would create violent tension again, but the majority didn't. Everyone hopes that lives stays as it is right now with an open border.

If this is the case, the Irish border will become even more peculiar, as it would shift to hubs of transport. The Irish border will be manifested on the airports, in the docks, where some sort of special status and control must be held because crossing the border would mean crossing from the UK in the EU or vice versa with all the different rules and regulations in play. In a sense the entire island of Ireland could become a border zone, as it is physically separated from the UK and the EU. It will become a special space, where the two geo-political power blocks intertwine, a fuzzy border space. The border between Northern Ireland and Ireland stays open, but the island itself becomes a post-modern border. The entire island is a continuum between the EU and the UK because of its physical geography as an island. A zone of mixing, a borderlands, but then enlarged to a greater scale. The border between the EU and the UK shifts to harbors, ports, airports or even to e-borders where the travel checks are held. The Irish border where it is now disappears and metamorphoses in these concentrated spaces becoming the real border between

the UK and EU, while the entire island becomes a mixture like water and oil in the same glass. Together, mixed yet separated. A place of in-transit between one side and the other. It would be a symbol of the borderlands, partly European, partly British, mixed and separated as a special case.

How does the borderland manifests itself through a cyclo-geography site visit for an outsiders perspective?

The bicycle has been a wonderful medium through which I read the landscape and understood places. The element of slow travelling has helped to shape an outsiders perspective on the borderlands. Many hearts and homes were opened because of the bicycle, an unique traveler visiting quiet places stands out and people are very eager to help. Because of my bicycle, which was a good conversation opener, I met many of my respondents. By sleeping and washing with the border I literally immersed myself in the border region. As opposed to traditional flaneuring, 'velo-flaneuring', gave me even more flexibility and freedom. I could cover more distances, while still being captured by the small details of the lands. Using a bicycle to create a bottom's up perspective and an ethnography on the borderlands with phenomenological traditions has been extremely helpful. It has already been well known in the tradition of travel writing, that a bicycle is an ingenious way to understand regions and help you to come in contact with locals. It's therefore a logical step and hopefully proven through this paper that it can be extended into human geography. When we take a look at the Latin name roots of geography, it means *describing or understanding the world*. Hence, cyclo-geography: understanding the world through the perspective of the bicycle.

To what extend is it possible to re-conceptualize the Irish-Northern Irish border?

The Irish border manifested itself differently on this trip than the 'line in the sand'. It shapes cross-border identities, it has shaped a sense of belonging outside the nation state and therefore created an element of de-legitimization feelings towards the nation-state of the UK. A post-colonial lens can be applied too, as this border has been constructed by a diminishing imperial power, in order to protect a religious-ethno community linked to the colonizer. The borderlands have also been a site of the core function of the EU, providing peace and reconciliation funds and infrastructural improvements to enhance cross-border connections; to a large extend successful. It has given economic agency because of the different economies intertwining and mixing here. And now with Brexit, the border will be the physical manifestation of the outcome of the negotiations. The Irish border has mixed the European Union and the United Kingdom in the borderlands and now the negotiations will have to do the same thing, the border is the symbol of the Brexit. The Irish borderlands are unique; connecting and separating, invisible, visible, practiced and ignored, it has been a wonderful ride.

10. References.

- Aldred, R., 2013. Who are londoners on bikes and what do they want? Negotiating identity and issue definition in a 'pop-up' cycle campaign. *Journal of Transport Geography*, Volume 30, p. 194–201.
- Allen, J., 2009. Three spaces of power: territory, networks, plus a topological twist in the tale of domination and authority. *Journal of Power*, 2(2), pp. 197-212.
- Allen, W., 2012. *Going through border Places: Security Practices and local perceptions of Insecurity as Filtration at the Kenya-Uganda Boundary*, Oxford: University of Oxford.
- Alvarez, R., 1995. The Mexican-US border: the making of an antropology of bordrlands. *Annual review of antropology*, Volume 24, pp. 447-470.
- Barnfield, A. & Plyushteva, A., 2015. Cycling in the post-socialist city: On travelling by bicycle in Sofia, Bulgaria. *Urban studies*, 53(9), pp. 1822-1835.
- Barton, B., 2010. Northern Ireland, 1939-45. In: J. R. Jill, ed. *A new history of Ireland VII: Ireland, 1921-84*. Oxford: Oxford publishing, pp. 235-260.
- Borges, J. L., 1949. *The Alpeh and Other Stories*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada.
- Bourdieu, P., 1977. *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Coakley, J. & O'Dowd, L., 2005. The Irish border and North-South Cooperation: An Overview. In: Renkin, ed. *Mapping frontiers, plotting pathways: routes to North-South Cooperation in a divided island*. Dublin: Institute for British-Irish Studies, pp. 20-42.
- Cox, P., 2005. *Competing Angendas in Selling cycling*, Dublin: Velo-city Dublin conference.
- de Certeau, M., 1984. *The practice of everyday life*. (Translated by Steven Rendall) ed. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Edensor, T., 2002. *National Identities in popular culture*. Oxford, UK: Berg.
- Edensor, T., 2003. Defamiliarizing the Mundane Roadscape. *Space and Culture*, 6(2), pp. 151-168.
- Edensor, T. & Holloway, J., 2009. Rhythmanalysing the coach tour: the ring of kerry, Ireland. *Transactions of the institute of British Geographers*, 33(4), pp. 483-501.
- English, R., 2003. *Armed Struggle: The history of the IRA*. 1 ed. Oxford: Oxford University press.
- European Parliament, 2017. *Northern Ireland Peace programme*, Brussels: European comission.
- Evans, J. & Jones, P., 2008. Mobile methodologies: theory, technology and practice. *Geography compass*, 2(5), pp. 1266-1285.
- Fincham, B., 2004. *Bicycle couriers: identity, risk & work*, University of Cardiff: unpublisch PhD thesis.
- Fincham, B., 2006. Bicycle messengers and the road to freedom. *Sociological review*, 54(1), pp. 208-222.

- Fincham, B., 2007. Bicycle messengers: image, identity and community. In: D. Horton, P. Rosen & P. Cox, eds. *Cycling & society*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, pp. 179-196.
- Fincham, B., McGuinness, M. & Murray, L., 2010. *Mobility Methodologies*. 2010 Edition ed. London: Pallgrave MacMillan.
- Furness, Z., 2007. Critical mass, urban space and velomobility. *Mobilities*, 2(2), pp. 299-319.
- Gielis, R. & Van Houtum, H., 2012. Sloterdijk in the House! Dwelling in the Borderscape of Germany and The Netherlands. *Geopolitics*, 17(4), pp. 797-817.
- Graham, B., 1997. The imagining of place: representation and identity in contemporary Ireland. In: G. Brian, ed. *In search of Ireland: a cultural geography*. London: Routledge, pp. 192-212.
- Guelke, A., 2017. the Risk to Northern Ireland. *Journal of Democracy*, 28(1), pp. 42-52.
- Hall, T., 2006. The Urban Sociology reader. *The sociological review*, 54(1), pp. 118-190.
- Ingold, T., 2004. Culture on the ground: the world perceived through the feet.. *Journal of Material culture*, 9(3), pp. 315-440.
- Johnson, C. et al., 2011. Interventions on rethinking the border in border studies. *Political Geography*, 30, pp. 61-69.
- Keenan, D., 2013. €18 million bridge over Carlingford Lough sparks political row in Stormont, Online resource: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/environment/18-million-bridge-over-carlingford-lough-sparks-political-row-in-stormont-1.1367581>: Irish Times.
- Kidder, J., 2005. Style & action: a decoding of bike messenger symbols.. *Journal of contemporary ethnography*, 34(2), pp. 344-367.
- Kolossov, V., 2005. Border Studies: Changing Perspectives and Theoretical Approaches. *Geopolitics*, 10(4), pp. 606-632.
- Lacoste, Y., 1976. *La géographie, ça sert d'abord à faire la guerre*. Paris: Maspéro 1976: Maspéro.
- MacNaghten, P. & Urry, J., 1997. *Contested natures*. London: Sage.
- Malpas, J., 2009. Place and Human being. *Environmental and architectural phenomenology*, 20(3), pp. 19-23.
- Massey, D., 2005. *For Space*.. London: Sage.
- Middleton, J., 2011. Walking the city: the geographies of everyday pedestrian practices. *Geography compass*, 5(2), pp. 90-105.
- Mulroe, P., 2017. *The Troubles, the border and Brexit – lessons from history*, Online resource: <http://www.irishnews.com/arts/2017/04/06/news/books-the-troubles-the-border-and-brexit-lessons-from-history-986942/>: Irish News.
- Neal, J. et al., 2016. Ireland and Brexit: A roundtable. *New Hibernia Review*, 20(4), pp. 17-43.

- Newman, D., 2006. Border and bordering: towards an interdisciplinary dialogue. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 9(2), pp. 181-186.
- Parker, N. & Vaughan-Williams, N., 2012. Critical Border Studies: Broadening and Deepening the 'Lines in the Sand' Agenda. *Geopolitics*, 17(4), pp. 727-733.
- Patterson, H., 2013b. The Provisional IRA, the Irish border, and Anglo-Irish relations during the Troubles. *Samm Wars & Insurgencies*, 24(3), pp. 493-517.
- Patterson, H., 2013. *Ireland's Violent Frontier: The Border and Anglo-Irish Relations During the Troubles*. 1st ed. Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Pringle, D. G., 1985. *One island, two nations? A political geographical analysis of the national*, Letchworth: Research Studies.
- Rankin, K. J., 2005. The creation and consolidation of the Irish border. In: K. J. Rankin, ed. *Mapping frontiers, plotting pathways: routes to North-South cooperation in a divided island*. Dublin: Institute for British-Irish Studies , pp. 2-28.
- Relph, E., 1970. An inquiry into the relations between phenomenology and geography. *Canadian geographer*, Volume 14, pp. 193-201.
- Roitman, J., 2005. *Fiscal disobedience: An anthropology of Economic regulation in Central Africa*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Seamon, D., 2013. Lived Emplacement and the Locality of Being: A Return to Humanistic Geography?. In: S. Aitken & V. Gill, eds. *Approaches to Human Geography*. London: Sage, pp. 42-65.
- Sheller, M. & Urry, J., 2006. The new mobilities paradigm. *Environment and Planning A*, 38(2), pp. 207-226.
- Soja, E., 1996. *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Solnit, R., 2001. *Wanderlust: a history of walking*. London: Verso.
- Special EU programmes body, 2013. *Project case Study: Termon Project*, Brussels: European Commission.
- Spinney, J., 2009. Cycling the city: movement, meaning and method. *Geography compass*, 3(2), pp. 817-835.
- The Irish borderlands , 2015. *Changing perspectives*. [Online]
Available at: <http://www.irishborderlands.com/changing/index.html>
[Accessed 12 07 2017].
- The Irish times, 2001. *No break for the Border*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/no-break-for-the-border-1.330234>
[Accessed 25 June 2017].
- Tuan, Y.-F., 1974. *Topophilia: a study of environmental perception, attitudes and values*. Columbia: Columbia University press.

Wilson, T. & Donnan, H., 2011. A sense of Border. In: *A companion to border studies*. Online: Blackwell Publishing, pp. 50-64.

Wylie, J., 2005. A single day's walking: narrating self and landscape on the South West Coast Path. *Transactions of the institute of Britische geographers*, 30(2), pp. 234-247.

Zartman, W., 2010. *Understanding lige in the borderlands: Boundaries in Depth and in Motion*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.

11. Appendices

11.1 Map of the border region

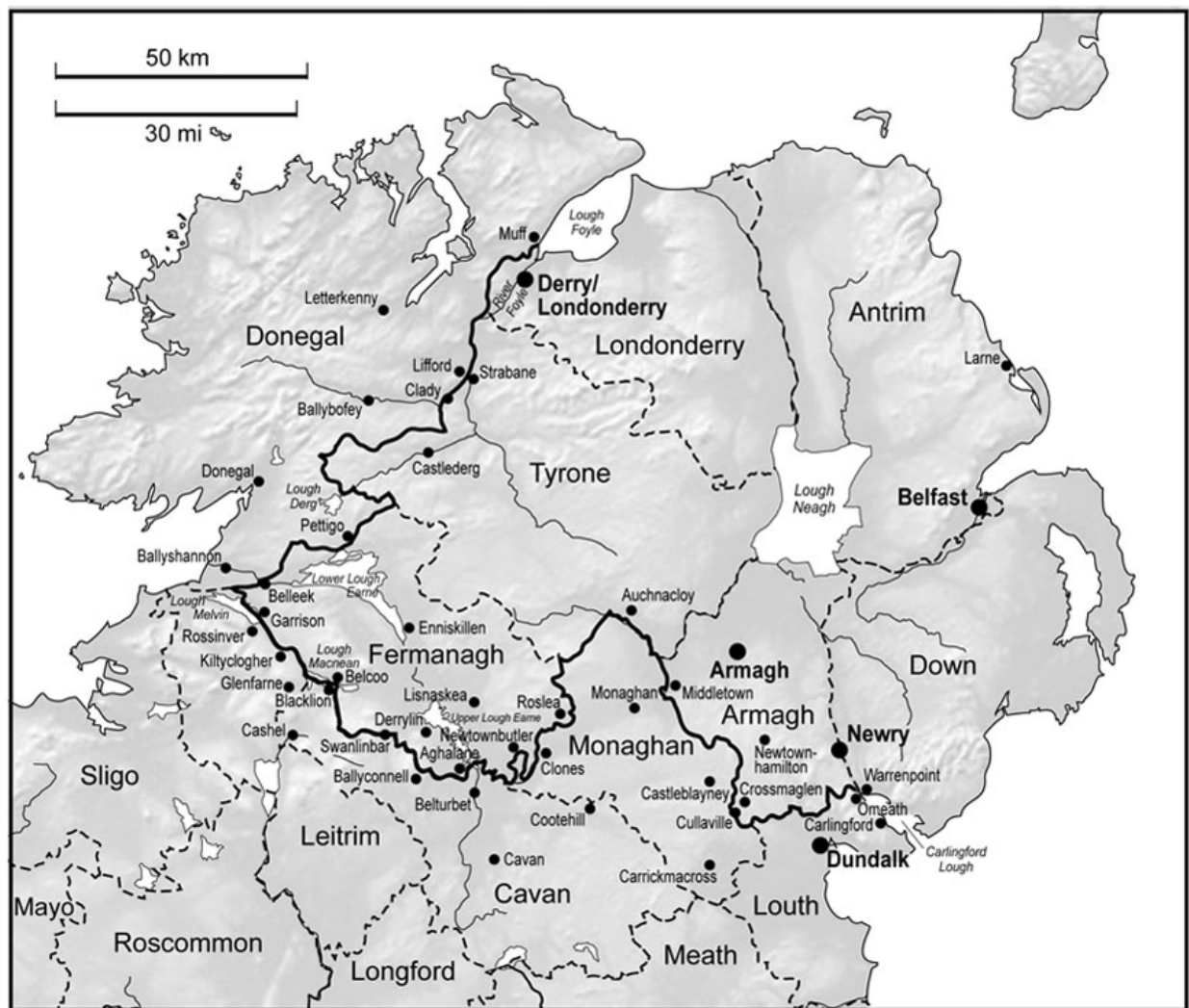


Figure 19: Map of the border region (map by Queen's Mary University London).

11.2 Transcriptions

The transcriptions can be found following this link:

<https://goo.gl/XAGVTB>

11.3 Atlas.ti analysis

Atlas.ti is a qualitative software program that enables to analyze transcriptions. Different phrases from the interviews can be coded and used for analyses. Below is a schematic table of all the different codes from the themes extracted from the interviews.



Figure 20: Life now codes.

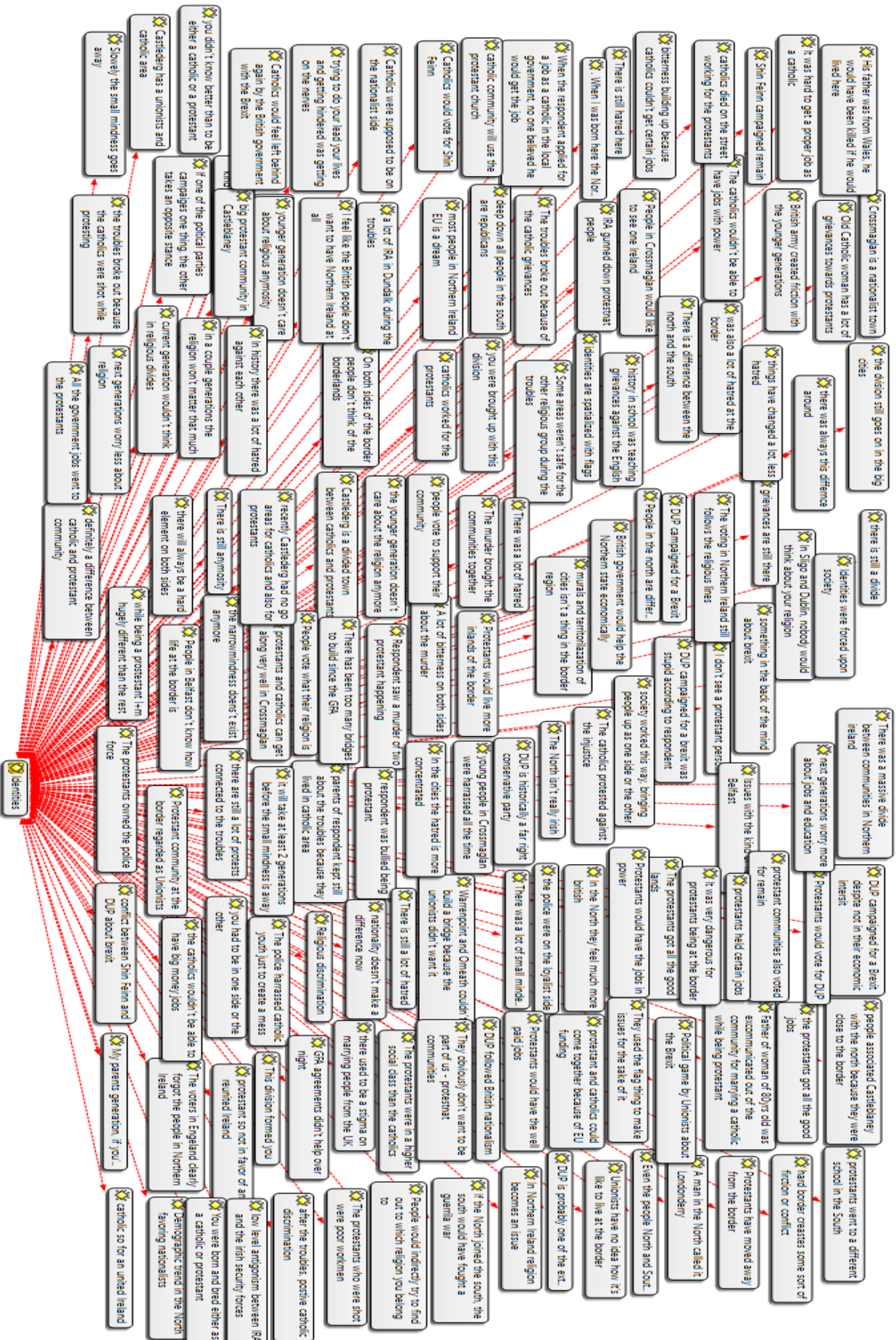


Figure 25: Identities codes.

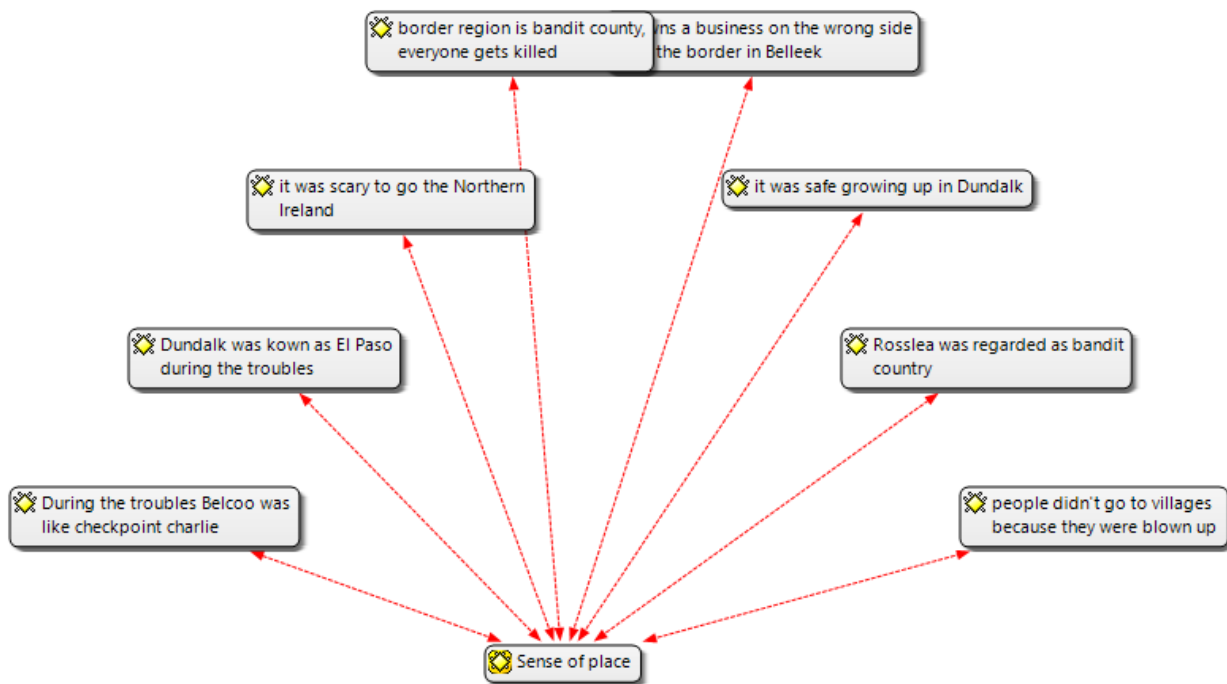


Figure 26: Sense of Place codes

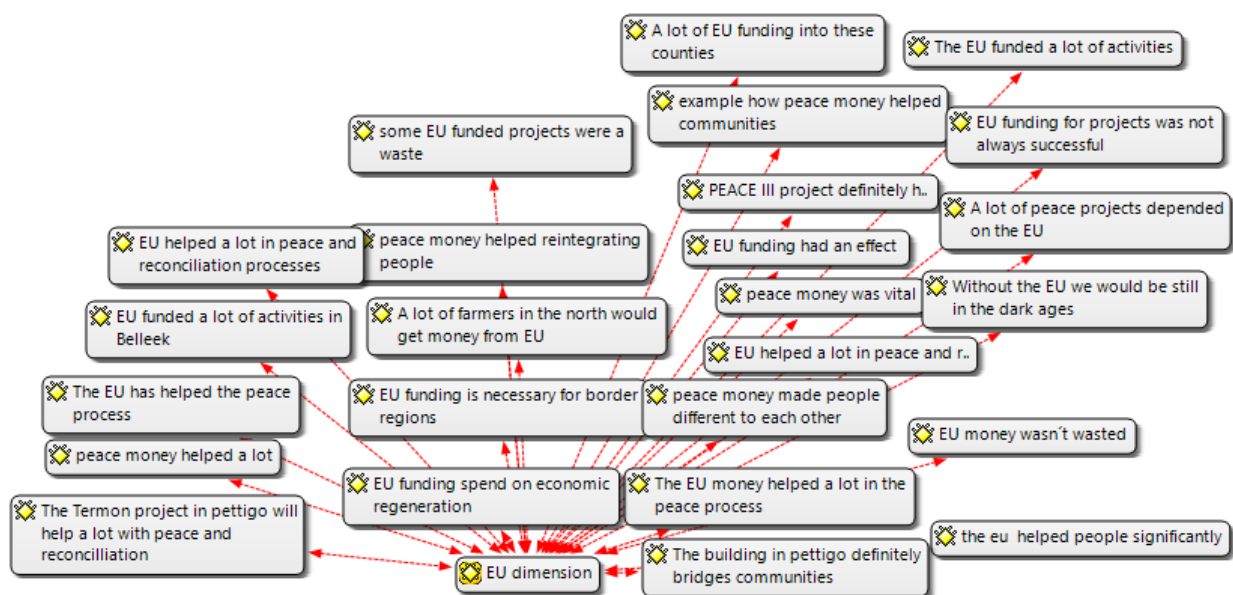


Figure 27: EU dimension codes.